# The Secret Files of Captain Sissy 4

Forgive me ~~Father~~ readers for I have ~~sinned.~~ slacked It's been two years since my last ~~confession.~~ zine Since that time I have taken over two administration buildings at my school, helped shut down major U.S. cities to protest global capitalism, read dozens of subversive books, distributed incendiary literature to minors, been a counselor at a camp for kids with gay and lesbian parents, organized Carpenters in California and Steelworkers in Kentucky; I've cross-dressed, skinny-dipped, hitch-hiked, found love, made love, strengthened my convictions, broadened my friendships, and deepened my understanding of who I am. I've graduated college, settled my debts, and now have commitments only to ideals. I'm the opposite of directionless. I'm all directions, all hope, all passion. I'm 23 years old and I'm all conviction.

You've got your hands on the fourth issue of the Secret Files of Captain Sissy, written by me, Andy Cornell. Though it has been two and a half years since the last issue, I've only been working on this one steadily for about six months. I graduated college in May of 2000, and lived in Pittsburgh for the following six months while I interned at the United Steelworkers of America. This zine plagued me like homework throughout that time. I felt an incredible need to write it—for the personal catharsis expressing myself brings, for the clarity I gain by writing out my ideas, and because of my desire to reach out to new people and give something back to all those I know who have inspired me and taught me over the past few years. It has served the first two goals already; I sure hope it serves the last one equally well.

This is a very political zine, but I hope you see the personal side of it too. While there aren't any lurid confessions or a lot of details about my day-to-day life, a number of the articles are about me figuring out what's important to me, where I fit in, and what I want to do with the rest of my life. Hopefully you'll also get more of a sense of who I am by reading some of the true stories of the wacky stuff I've done lately. Wacky is a strange word. Spiffy. Snazzy. Wacky. Ugly ass words. That reminds me: sometimes words or phrases—concepts, really—pop into my head from nowhere. I was stuffing envelopes the other day and all of a sudden I thought: Grease Mallet. What the hell is a grease mallet? I don't know. You should write me a letter and tell me the first thing that comes to mind when you hear (or read) the words *grease mallet*. You could even provide an illustration. Sounds like a contest! Also, *blowhound*. That popped into my head the other day too. But that sounds pretty gross—like some kind of cut-down. "God, Randy...you're such a blowhound!" Anyway...

I am sad to have to announce the end of Words As Weapons—the zine distro that my friends Adam and Ariana and I have run for three years. We love doing it, but now that school is done none of us are planning on staying anywhere for any length of time, and we'll probably end up in three different cities eventually. So it will be pretty impossible to give it the attention it deserves. I want to thank all the zine editors whose work we've carried, and everyone who has ever ordered zines or bought some at shows. Everyone we owe money to will be paid very soon and plans are in the works for another distro to carry the remaining stock. It's really sad to see it go. W.A.W. R.I.P.

Speaking of moving around all the time, I'm planning on traveling my ass off for the next year or so. I want to visit all the major metropolitan areas of the U.S. to see what is going on in terms of music and activism and nice people in order to figure out where I will be happiest and most productive in terms of plugging into the "movement." Plus, I just want to have some really good conversations with interesting, thoughtful people. So, if you are interested in hanging out and showing me around your town, I would love to come visit. Email or write me a real letter.

I guess I should wrap this up, but there's one last thing I want to say before I do. There is a lot of idealism in the following 60 pages. There's also a

lot of criticism. This is a zine about youth insurrection, which is probably the most romantic thing I can imagine. I hope you are with me on that. I hope we are on the same side. People might say, "Why are you so negative? Isn't *anything* ever good enough for you?" But don't be ashamed to be radical.

If you demand social change conservatives will often try to turn things around on you and give you a guilt complex by saying, "You want *more*?! You already have the most privileges of anyone in the world—a car, a house, a DVD player—what more could you want?" But they are speaking about something completely different. We are not greedy for asking for something better—which is far different from asking for something more. We might be asking for more of some intangible things—more honestly, more excitement, more purpose, more equality—but the way we are suggesting we realize these desires is by having less of what we already have—less work, less commercials, less products, less environmental destruction. Always remember that it is them—your interrogators—who want more, demand more, take more, and think they deserve more. What we demand more of is immaterial and therefore isn't in limited supply.

Be loud, radical, and proud.
I hope you enjoy the zine.

Andy Cornell

Andy Cornell
January 15, 2001

Docter, please! You've got to help me. This...this college...it's changed me. I...I can't help but write in this freaky intellectual jargon!

Pull yourself together, son! Now think. Is there anything you've done... maybe something you've eaten...to cause this hideous change?

I...I don't know. I think I've spent too much time studying culture...and not enough time making it!

# MAIL

**I was hoping to include more responses to the last issue here, but I didn't get very many and this one turned out really long. One thing a lot of people said was, "There wasn't enough personal stuff in issue #3." That's sweet that ya'll want to get to know me better, so I've tried to include more personal stuff in this issue!**

2/24/00
Andy—

Just finished reading SFCS#3 and wanted to let you know that I really liked it; in other words, it was a lot better than most of the zines coming through my mailbox. Of course, I have a few responses.

Your little travelogue on the DC trip & Americanism was interesting and all, but I just couldn't get over how mired in contradiction it seemed. Perhaps you'll shoot back, "Ah, yes Ani, but aren't we all?" But does it have to be so flagrant? First, you say the woman collecting Pepsi Points was "a little overboard," yet it seems to me she could well say the same thing about the guy, nay the asshole, spraying Diet Coke all over people. More importantly, you rail on people for being so "American," but it seems to me that HC/punk is totally imbued in America traditions—DIY individualism, entreprenuerialism (albeit on a smaller scale), general disconnectedness from society, anti-statism (let's face it, a major Anglo-American thing when compared to much of Asia, Eastern Europe, etc.). I'm curious how you reconcile these contradictions, or at least what you think of them.

A small thing. The rant based on the L. Summers' memo was just easy pickings. Talk about a straw man. people need to see that the problem is deeper, that the problem in many ways rests at the foundations of neoliberalism, not in its excesses. Also, why "Smash the fucking state!"? At least the state has some ability to regulate business and is subject to democratic control to a certain extent.

New Work. OK, my first reaction was that this Bergmann character is pulling an old academic trick in trotting some old ideas out in new clothing. His goal seems to be Marx, mutatis mutandis, i.e., "fish in the morning, plow in the afternoon, critique Western thought at night." On more substantive issues, there is no plan for getting from point A (present) to utopic point B (land of fulfilled creative workers w/16 hour work weeks). He vaguely seems to reference technology/automation filling the gap, but isn't that a classic "technology will save us" stance? More realistically, the intermediate steps would probably look like shorter work weeks, overtime regulation, better welfare/healthcare, increased minimum wage, development of a civic culture...things that the left/labor have wanted for decades. Moreover Bergmann makes some typical academic leftist mistakes, things that have restrained radical-labor relations for 30 years and generally held up a leftist agenda. He refers to workers as "miles and miles from being human beings." My basic response is: Fuck You. More over, he models his utopia on academia—like how he refers in the interview to grant-getting, scholarships, etc. My final question to the New Work agenda (which I agree with in all the ways it conforms with/reproduces traditional leftist thought) is this: why is boredom and lack of excitement the focus? This tendency seems to indicate more middle-class malaise as an underlying motivation than concern for people who aren't fulfilling their human potential. I think the basic tenets of New Work are analytically on point, but why abandon institutions and lines of thought which are established, and take us to near the same destination, and aren't wrapped up in assholic intellectualism? Just a question...

I really am curious about your responses, so let me know. Also, overall I thought your zine was good and clearly thought provoking. I'm interested in #4 and what will come up there.

Take Care,
Ani

Ani,

Thanks a lot for responding to me after reading my zine, and especially for bringing up specific questions and critiques. I've received relatively few responses, and those usually just said, "Good zine!" While that is flattering it isn't challenging, and doesn't provide much opportunity for either of us to learn something new.

On the 4th of July story, and contradictions: Sure, we all have contradictions, but I wouldn't offer that as a defense. I actually wrote something the subject of hypocrisy and contradictions in SCS#1, which I would send you but the master copy is in a

box in my parent's basement. Absolutely, the Pepsi Point Woman could have claimed that my friends and I were overboard—we certainly were, and I'm glad we were. I mentioned her not as any form of poignant metaphor about American culture, or to specifically make fun of her or chastise her for collection Pepsi points, but just because it was another amusing part of the night. I think it was smart of her to collect the Pepsi points, she probably got a lot of free stuff, which I'm always for (although I think the true point behind the Pepsi Point thing was to create walking billboards out of Pepsi consumers at a low cost, which is lame). The difference in us being overboard, and her being overboard is that we were having one of the best nights of our lives by being goofy and reveling in the contradictions going on around us, whereas she just seemed very uptight and inhospitable. I was sorry for getting Pepsi on that guy and I apologized profusely; she was just selfish and mean.

As for Hardcore being "imbued in American tradition" I agree to an extent. I would make a distinction between what is generally touted as American traditions and values, and the values and behaviors that truly make up American's lives today. The former would include things like individualism, entreprenurialism, reverence for national icons and symbols, belief in self-government, self-education, etc. The latter would include many of the characteristics I was describing in my piece: consumerism, individualism to the point of isolation, spectatorship, disregard for the environment, and performance of ritualistic (as opposed to sincere) patriotism. My underlying intention was to outline the difference between these two sets—first, to point out that Americanism is quite divergent from what we claim it to be, and secondly, to critique various aspects of this "true" Americanism. Now, I'm not one to defend hardcore/punk unconditionally and paint it as a utopian alternative to mainstream culture. I believe it has some very fundamental flaws, but I also feel that many aspects of it are positive and are a start in the right direction of building a culture that makes sense and is enjoyable to me. I see DIY individualism as important in creating ways of living without supporting people or institutions at odds with our beliefs. I think the entreprenurial things is way out of hand and mimics the commodity obsessed mainstream. At the same time, however, it does show that young people have a lot of initiative, and that they are capable of creating alternative cultural items and institutions. Words As Weapons, the zine distro I do with my friends Adam and Ariana is often part of the "punk flea market" at festivals and shows. However, we operate it on principles quite divergent from most businesses, and with quite opposite intentions. So, there are contradictions there as well. As for "general disconnectedness from society" I think that many self-conscience, politically minded punk kids do want to disassociate from many tenets of mainstream society, but I see honest impulses towards trying to create a counter-culture (society) that is based much more on true connection, mutual respect and interdependency. As for anti-statism, I think hardcore kids today often take this on in a sloganeering way that is lacking in a lot of critical analysis and support. I think it comes from an instinct that things aren't in order as they should be, but an inability to present a thorough and complete criticism topped with a ready made alternative. I'm not sure I understand what you meant when you called anti-statism Anglo-American. Are you speaking about in hardcore, in society at large, or both?

On to the Lawrence Summers note: I agree that his note is an extreme example, condensed and shocking. But I don't think including it and commenting on it is irresponsible or ineffective. When I read that memo the first time the callousness of it deeply upset me. But it also served as one more piece of evidence supporting my feelings of how politics and economics operates. I agree that it can't stand alone as a critique of neo-liberalism, capitalism, or the orientation of senior governmental policy makers, but I don't think it has too. Sure, people need to understand the roots of the issues. I need to understand them much more thoroughly myself. I wasn't prepared to do that in my zine, nor did I want to. One thing that I find powerful in many zines is the way they start their readers on a process of thinking about an issue, and that they work in dialogue with other zines. I think discussion of these issues is a work in progress between many voices expressed in different ways through zines. Perhaps my one page piece about Summer's memo drew some kids into thinking about development economics, who would not have sat down and read a whole book, or even a whole zine about it.

As for the "Smash the fucking state" comment, it was mainly in gest. Notice the exagerated "Arrrrgh" before that last sentence. I frequently confuse or anger friends because when I say things they can't tell if I'm being completely straight forward, being facetious, or a combination. Honestly, I don't always know myself. So the comment was half an expression of how upset the memo made me, half mocking other punk kids whose politics come off as overly simplistic and sloganeering to me (as I critiqued later on in the Franchise Activism article). I feel that in the U.S. corporations are the number one concern of people concerned with freedom and justice, not the state. So, I'd agree with your criticism of me saying "Smash the state" if I had been totally

serious about it. Good point.

Okay, on to New Work. First of all, I now feel, two years after I put the zine out, that I wasn't critical enough when I wrote the article. It was actually the last thing I needed to finish for the zine, and I rushed through it to some extent. If I were doing it today I would probably still write something about New Work, but I would put in the context of other ideas about alternative job and economic systems as well—talk about Michael Albert's Participatory Economics, and whatnot. So, I don't have a completely worked out, heartfelt defense of it to offer you, because I certainly don't consider my self a New Workist or anything like that. First of all, I would want to see it all on paper, from Bergmann, and study it very thoroughly. I try not to commit myself or label myself according to ideas/ movements that I don't fully grasp and feel comfortable with. Bergmann is working on a book about his ideas, but he's writing the damn thing in German, because that is where he is doing a lot of work (he's actually Austrian in origin). But, I can answer some of you questions I think.

I think that the ideas in New Work go beyond what the current labor movement is focused on in a few ways. Its based around the idea of having a fulfilling life, of doing what one desires, instead of what doing just what one has to do to survive. It looks at work and sees in it the main shaping force of a persons life. Instead of saying, work sucks, lets do as little as possible, it says work can be a good thing, if one is doing something fulfilling. That resonates with me because of personal experience. After I graduated high school I had some money, and I didn't work at all, or go to school, or anything for about 4 months, and it was one of the most depressing periods in my life. Though I am now busy almost around the clock because my schoolwork is so hard, I am happier now than I was then, because the work I'm doing is fulfilling.

I think that New Work also addresses consumption and vacuous culture in a way that the labor movement doesn't. The labor movement wants to keep people in jobs, wants to keep the economy going strong. To do that means to produce stuff—even stuff people don't need (or even want until they are prodded to by commercials). New work ideas helped me make connections about the contradictions of that cycle of work-buy-work-buy. New work talks about being self-sustaining to a larger degree—growing your own food, making your own house, etc. I think this is beneficial in a few ways: people have a closer relationship with the things they consume, have more respect for the environment, and they have more variety in their lives.

Now I don't know where Bergmann stands on this, but I certainly don't see implementing these ideas as competition against the labor movement. While I think the labor movement has flaws, I'm overall supportive of it. I did Union Summer last summer, working for the Carpenters Union in Northern California. I'm considering interning or working full time with a union next year. Maybe unions have some of these additionally ideas as goals, but I haven't ever heard them articulated. Perhaps they are considered "pie-in-the-sky" and have to take backseat to the more pressing concerns of wages and security. I totally understand that. I don't know what the best strategy for moving in this direction is, but I'm certainly interested in thinking about it and exploring possibilities. I think the suggestions you gave—shorter work week, better healthcare, better wages, etc.— are all good directions to go.

As for the "workers are miles away from being human beings," I understand how you would take that as being completely classist and condescending. I didn't take it that way because I don't think he meant it that way. I'm not going to speak for him, but personally I feel nearly everyone is miles and miles from being human beings, if that means really fulfilling potential. Management, as much as hourly workers, is often "miles and miles from being human." I think we are limited by external forces and we limit ourselves. Why is boredom important? Why isn't concern for people's well being the top motivating concern? I think the two go together in a way. The economic system needs to produce consumer culture, which by my estimate, is boring because its not authentic and heartfelt. Having to spend you life working a job you hate makes people boring because it makes them unhappy and uncreative. I agree with you though, that the number one concern should be making sure everyone's primary needs like food and shelter are met, not making industrialized nations even more pleasurable to live in. I'm just interested in exploring where the two meet, and what kind of potential lies there. I went to Z Media Institute a few years ago, and Michael Albert said something that made a whole lot of sense to me. He said people come into radical politics, by starting out with an aspect that affects them on a direct personal level. So maybe a woman that is oppressed by patriarchy starts learning about sex oppression, then reads about how its related to class oppression, race oppression etc. So how do privileged middle class kids (especially white males) get into radical politics? Perhaps critiquing consumer culture and their shitty day job will open some doors, if someone laid out some of the connections.

I'd love to hear back from you. Write when you get a chance. Thanks again for taking the time respond to my zine.

Andy

There's a hot new commodity.

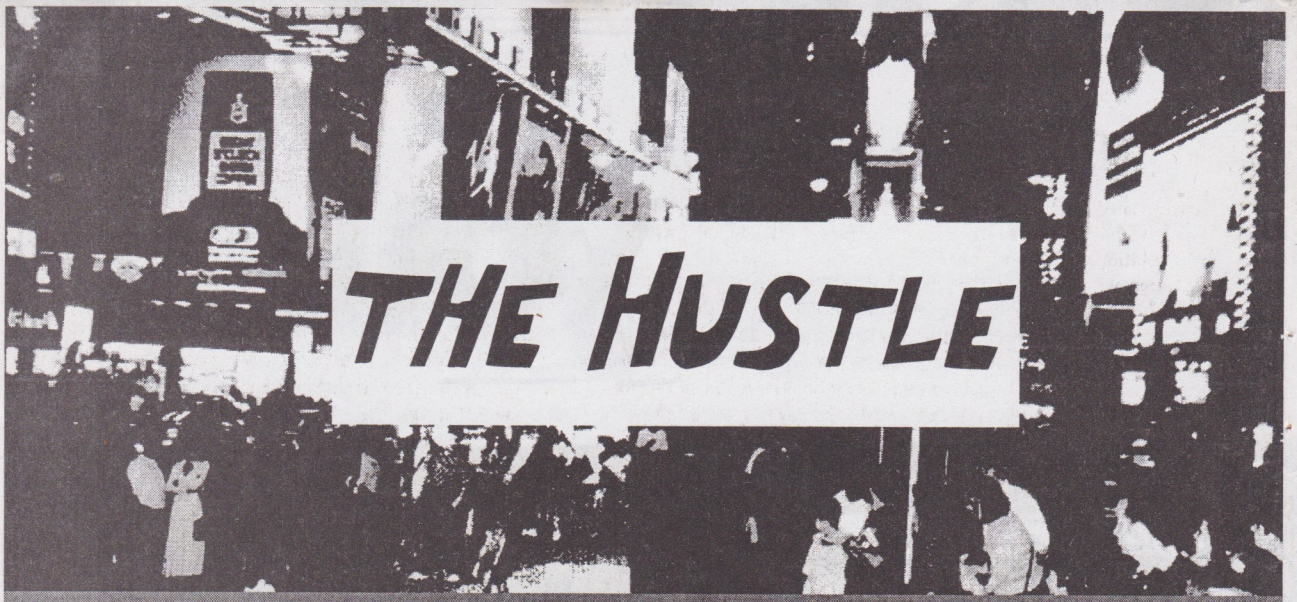
# you.

## College Graduates

Bourgeois colleges
turn out college graduates
into a changing world
without ever telling them
how to keep it from changing
or how to change it
so as to make it fit
for college graduates.
College graduates
think in terms of jobs
not in terms of work.
Since the world is upside down,
taking the side down
and putting it up
should be the task
of college graduates.
But college graduates
would rather
play somebody else's game
in a position
than to create order
out of chaos.

~Peter Maurin

I graduated from college in May. During that last month, while I was trying to figure out what to do with myself come summer, I ran across these two very different takes on what lies ahead for college graduates like myself. The first is a snippet of a full page ad placed in the campus newspaper by an investment banking firm trying to recruit graduating business school students for their entry-level positions. The one to the left is a poem I clipped from a radical newspaper, The Catholic Agitator, published almost thirty years ago. I don't think I need to say more...



# THE HUSTLE

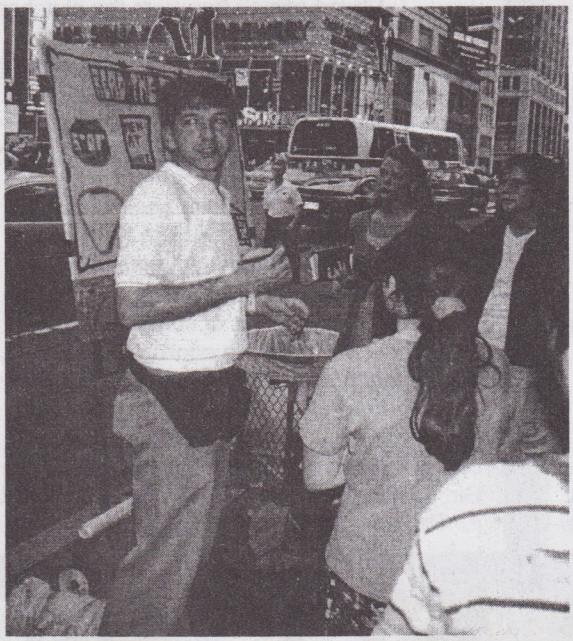
Whenever I go to New York City I end up wandering around Times Square. The last time I was in town I asked the friend I was staying with if she wanted to walk around up there with me. She seemed astonished that I would even suggest such a thing and said, "Are you kidding?. I always walk way out of my way to *avoid* Times Square. Its so commercial!" "Well, yeah, obviously," I replied, a little snippy, "but there's more to it than that. I just find it kind of fascinating." I think the draw is that, just like the cartooney sketches street artists do of tourists at all its main intersections, Times Square is a caricature of American culture. It exagerates all of our most unseemly social features—the over-saturation of advertising, the extreme disparities in wealth, the rampant sexism—and yet it does it in a manner that people are willing to fork over large sums of money to be a part of.

That evening I navigate my way up Broadway, bumping into people as I crane my neck to look up at the oversized billboards—a giant black and white Cindy Crawford in giant cotton panties, Mahatma Ghandi extolling me to Think Different and buy a Mac insted of a PC, the requisite Marlboro Man riding across the 12th through 18th floors of some office building, a flashy electronic British Airways jet popping out of the ad, and plenty more.

I cross the street and head back the way I came, peering in souvenier shops and chain restaurants. At about 47th St., I notice a thin middle-aged man standing perfectly still, a little hunched over, on an empty milk crate. He has a hand-painted cardboard sign that says "Put a dollar in the bucket to see human robot work" A well dressed young couple strides past. The man stops suddenly, and tugs on the sleeve of the woman's sweater, motioning for her to back up a second. "Let's see this," he says. The woman looks uninterested and shrugs indifferently. When the man tosses a dollar in the bucket, the human mannequin lifts his head, moves his arms in a jerky "robot" motion for about twenty seconds, then freezes again. "That's it!?" cries the guy, embarrassed and disappointed. "What a rip!" The woman just rolls her eyes, and they walk off. It's a strange scene. The robot guy obviously has a talent—standing still—but that's the part of his act that everyone gets to witness for free. Its stuff like this that I come to Times Square to

see. Not the bulging windows of techno-trinket dealers, not the twelve story billboards, and not the overpriced theme restaurants which beg, plead, and grovel for an ounce of my attention.

Up the street, in front of the Doubletree Hotel, a different man, this one probably in his early 40s and sporting some sort of greasy quasi-jerri curl hairdo, is shuffling three worn and creased playing cards back and forth on a cardboard box set on its side. He asks people passing by to place a bet and try to keep track of the red card, but most of them keep their heads stiffly pointed forward, as if they were all wearing neck braces. I can't believe that Three Card Monte dealers can still hustle



people these days. It seems like the biggest cliché. Like the last advice the neighbors give small town midwesterners about to hop in the station wagon to explore the "Big Apple" for the first time is, "Watch out for the guys shuffling the cards! They'll rip you off."

I stand off to the side a little to watch, and a woman briskly walks up to the dealer and asks him in the cheesiest, most overacted style you can imagine, "Hmm. What's this?"

"Just follow the red card. Its easy. Double your money!" he says, rapidly shuffling the three cards back and forth on the box..

"Well, okay. Here's twenty dollars," she says, pulling a twenty out of one of the pockets of her sweatpants. I'm looking for the cue-cards she must be reading off of. How anyone could not realize that this was a total set up I can't fathom, but this little exchange got quite a few tourists to pause and watch.

After another thirty seconds of shuffling, the dealer asks the woman, "Okay, where's the red one."

"Uh, that one," she says, pointing.

He flips the card and of course its red. "Shit. You win," he beams. "Forty bucks."

All of a sudden hundreds of dollars materialize. People are pealing off twenties and fifties like mobsters in a Robert De Niro movie, waving them in the dealer's face. Their excited, staccato vocalizations boil down to "Me next. Me next! Ooo. No me!" After three or four people loose their money in less than two minutes, a dopey guy with a hand held camcorder wanders up and starts taping the proceedings. A big guy in a velour zip up running jacket, who had been standing off to the side, seemingly just watching, like I was doing, raises a big meaty hand and bellows, "No cameras! Get tha fuck out uv here!" I'm thinking, Oh shit, he's in on it too!? How many other people around me are in on this hustle? As if to answer my internal monologue, some guy behind me yells, "Cops!!" The dealer reflexively kicks over the box and disappears around the corner with the woman and the heavy. The lookout and another guy split in the opposite direction. The tourists look at each other with slightly astonished looks on their faces, sheepishly put their money back into billfolds and purses, and wander off themselves.

Not ten minutes later, I witness a man dressed plainly in a white T-shirt and jeans set his easel up a few blocks away from the other artists. With herds of businesspeople pushing by, he begins to daub paint on thin flip chart paper. A few people, presumably first-timers to the area, stop to watch, but the majority walk past, especially when they notice the artist's painting is as simplistic as a preschooler's.

A few minutes later, though, a dozen or so people, dressed suspiciously similarly in simple floral print skirts or faded navy blue Dockers, saunter up, forming a tight semi-circle around the painter. They appear intrigued with the artist and his work, some standing on tip-toes to get a better view. I linger a few feet away, sensing that I've happened upon something a little strange again. My feelings are confirmed when I notice each of these new spectators is discreetly holding a miniature bible in the palm of his or her hand.

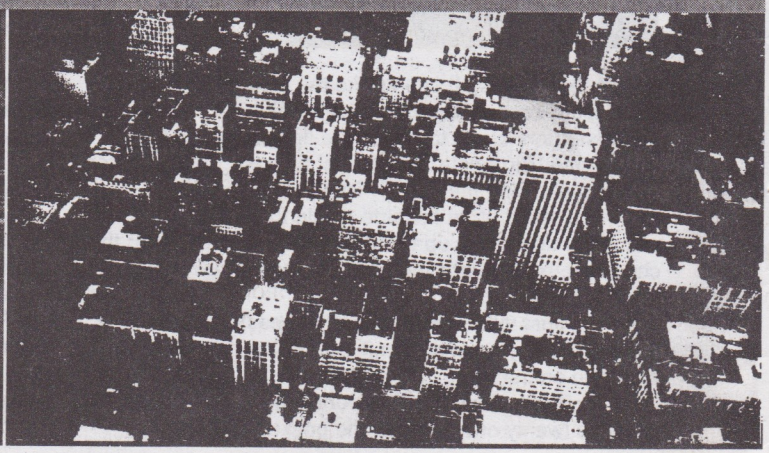
The small oogling crowd, nearly obscuring my view of the artist, attracts a larger audience, curious to learn just what, amongst all the chaos and glamour of Times Square, is worthy of so much attention. I'm caught up in the press of the crowd as still more people join in. When his audience reaches a critical mass, the artist swivels around to face the crowd and suddenly becomes a preacher. As he begins to speak of the miracle of Jesus, the man fills in the cryptic boxes and symbols he just painted with Biblical terms and quotation numbers. With a thin brush he quickly dabs the word "Heaven" over a messy blue cloud.

Groans of resentment well up from the assembled crowd as they quickly figure out the trap they've stumbled into. They turn to walk away, completely uninterested in being late for their dinner reservations in order to get publicly berated for their moral failings. But they are stopped dead in their tracks by members of the original crowd—the ones clenching the mini-bibles— who have slinked out from the center and formed a tight circle around the rest of the crowd. They press leaflets to the chests of the spectators, offering hot tips, like stock brokers, on how to downsize sinful temptation, and streamline their way into heaven.

The two incidents I'd just witnessed were far too similar to write off as coincidence. A shady actor trying to get something—money in the first place, attention in the second—from people passing by, accomplices masquerading as onlookers to draw a crowd, then serving as heavies to insure that the real crowd doesn't leave until they loose their money or hear the word of god. Since Three Card Monte scams date back to before the turn of the century, and I'd never seen anything like this type of missionary ploy before, there was nothing else to conclude but that Christians, the self-proclaimed avatars of vice, were ripping off the techniques of street hustlers. God's work nothing, they were doing the work of con-artists! Smug little atheist that I am, I can't stop grining at the hypocrisy for next twenty minutes.

Prying myself free from the clutches of the Churchies, I walk across the street to check out a place with a colorful sign reading, "Too Much Is Not Enough." It turns to be a fancy virtual reality arcade with games that cost two-fifty each, so I get out of there pretty quick.

After that I watch a blues band play a few songs on a corner and then I see some amazing break dancing kids perform in the median of the street. They dance to beats another kid pounds out of some five gallon pickle buckets, a cookie cooling rack, and some steel pots. Fucking amazing. The one girl in the group, is even wearing the same amount and type of clothes as the guys--a baggy running suit, not some spandex Spice Girl midriff shit. There's just no pretension to it. They dance for like fifteen minutes, then



just walke around with a hat and say, "If you like what you saw, support us with a little money." Its just stands in stark contrast to the hype around everything else, the rip-off theatre ticket prices, the billboard I notice with an orange rind wrapped around a neaked women, like she was a piece of fruit to be pealed. Watching the dancers cheers me up a bit and gets my mind off thinking about con-artists, the consumerism, and everything else that Times Square exudes. I'm fascinated by the place, but I have to admit that it's pretty draining. I decide I've had enough, and head back to my friend's place.

As I'm passing the All-Star Café, men in their twenties open up suitcases of merchandise. Strolling tourists swarm them when one of the men shouts out, "Oakley Sunglasses, ten dollars!" The suitcase next to the Oakleys contains piles of neatly folded T-shirts and sweatshirts emblazoned with name brand designer logos—Ralph Lauren, Nike, and Tommy Hilfiger. Again, the men are charging only ten dollars for merchandise that fetches $40 to $100 in any store. Middle aged couples with Midwestern and Southern accents pile up three deep, clamoring through their wallets and pocketbooks to buy up fashion apparel for themselves and their children back home.

Here we go again. More con-artists! "God damn. How stupid can people be?" I think. I know instantly that the shirts and sunglasses are knock-offs. It's intuitive since they are being sold out of suitcases on the street with no sales tax added. But my sense goes beyond that; I can see that the products are somehow wrong. Fine details tip me off: the fonts aren't kerned quite right, the trademark colors are a miniscule off hue. The "Air" in the Nike Air T-shirt is too spaced out, the red in the Tommy logo just a little too orange. I'd be suspicious of these clothes even if they were being sold in Bloomingdales.

I start to feel a little bit dirty. How do I know these clothes look fake? I've never owned a single piece of clothing by any of these companies, yet I know each of their logos intimately. I can avoid purchasing the products, but my subconscious is absolutely aware of the images and the corporate personalities. They're inside me, like tapeworms, I realize. And if the images are inside me, what about the ideas—and the values—behind them? I'm starting to feel that I, too, have been getting conned somewhere along the line. I think I'm above the petty trickery, smart enough to outwit those trying to take advantage of me, but their is no denying that these companies have a hold of part of my consciousness to a truly disturbing extent.

This is the snapping point for me—everything begins to fall into place. I'm struck suddenly with the realization that the Three Card Monte games and these guys hawking T-shirts they screen printed in their basements pale in comparison to the life size con-game that is transpiring all around us. I mean, what's a con-artist really? Its someone who convinces people he can give them something they desire for little expense or risk. Right? The con is that the con-artist gives the victims something worth less than they thought they were getting.

Women as seats for men's big asses?

So what about the consumer capitalist propaganda that doubles as the name of an arcade? What about the billboards that promise respect, sexual vitality, health, wealth, and contentment? Aren't they using a visual language to shout at us, "Come on! Put the money down! Buy the panties, buy the cigarettes." And more abstractly, "Work. Go to work. You need this. You need to work to get this. Just bet your life. Put your passion on the table. You can triple your excitement!" And like that, all those things—your passion, your

time, your relationships with other human beings—are gone. But there are bodies crawling over bodies here, in front of my face, to be the next to loose everything.

What difference is there really between the woman colluding with the card shuffler, pretending to win so easily, and the ethic imbued in us from age five? "Look what you can win, if you play the game of capitalism. It's so easy to succeed." Just like it was for the dealer's accomplice, it *is* easy to succeed—if you're in on the hustle. How different is it to be offered the chance to watch a masterpiece being created, but ending up with a stale sermon from a boring preacher, and being offered eroticism, pleasure, and a joyous life, but actually coming through with lung cancer and cotton underwear that your belly hangs over just like it hung over the last pair?

It's just a matter of scale, I realize. What's called a hustle and what's called advertising is just a matter of perspective and who's doing the naming.

After this revelation, it seems so ironic that the guys making these knock-offs in their basement are considered con-artists for falsely claiming a product is authentic, when the people who work for the companies that make the real thing are considered ingenious respectable businessmen. Isn't it the businessmen—the marketing directors, the advertising executives—that are conning us into believing a white T-shirt with ink on it is an attitude towards life and an important marker of our cultural wits? Aren't they the ones that have convinced us that sunglasses are worth hundreds of dollars more than it costs to make them because they make us cooler people- better people? The fact that we have fallen for it doesn't negate the fact that they are being disingenuous.

The late Stokely Charmichael said that revolutionaries have to take negatives and turn them into positives. On my way back to my friend's apartment that night, I realize that in those suitcases of knock-off merchandise there's a way to begin exposing this con-game. The fake T-shirts are subversive on two levels.

The power of the brand name merchandise is its exclusivity. Not everyone can have expensive shirts, so those who do have them are considered fortunate. If everyone knows that a logo marks a shirt expensive, shirts with that logo can sell for much more than those without it, creating a cycle of over-value. But if these guys are making shirts that are indistinquishable from the originals to most consumers, they punch a hole in that cycle. Nike is no longer as exclusive. Not only the cool people can wear Nike shirts. The more uncool people wear the Nike shirts, the less cool Nike becomes.

The second level is in the logos themselves. The street hawkers don't get them quite right. What, I wonder, would be the effect of intentionally distorting logos. Every swoosh Nike puts on a shoe or piece of clothing is exactly like another one, same with the Adidias symbol, the McDonalds arch, and every other trademarked logo. The constant repitition of it on TV, at the mall, on billboards, in the newspaper, at sporting arenas, in store window fronts, and on the actual clothes, is what burns it in our heads, makes us internalize it. They are so ubiquitous that we don't consciously realize how much we see them. That's why I didn't realize how detailed a knowledge I had of them. What if we were to slightly alter them, just enough so that they seem somehow wrong, but not enough for shoppers to discern exactly how they are wrong. It forces them to consciously process the fact that they are looking at a logo, and not simply internalize the latest marketing tag line or buzzwords that the con-artists/advertising executives have tied to them. It would cut the Pavlovian response. What happens when you sell someone a shirt that looks like its made by Ralph Lauren, but let them know, "This isn't an authentic Ralph Lauren shirt."? They have to question the concepts of worth and image, and what is real, if only for a brief second, before they get distracted by a football star climbing out of a limosine, or a 50 foot wide video screen streaming stock quotes and Christina Aguilara videos.

I think that's pretty cool, what these rip-off merchants are doing. They sure don't look like they are getting rich off this. I highly doubt they are intentionally trying to demystify the power of a logo. They're just trying to eek out a living. But the way they're doing it is subversive, at least to a small degree. Subversion for subsistence. That sounds pretty good to me.

# the evolution of fast food:

if we must die,
let it not be like hogs.

# THERE ARE NO QUEER TEEN SUICIDES, ONLY QUEER TEEN MURDERS.

Anyone who espouses anti-gay rhetoric, anyone who says its unnatural to love someone of the same sex, anyone who calls someone a faggot or a dyke maliciously, anyone who does not challenge heterosexuality as a cultural norm, is implicated in the deaths of queer teenagers who take their own lives. Those deaths are not suicides, they're murders. The young people are just doing to their bodies what others have already done to their souls. They don't kill themselves, Christians kill them, television writers kill them, Big Red gum commercials kill them, their parents kill them, their schools kill them. I kill them and so do you. We need to move beyond confronting homophobia to challenging heterosexism. When we don't challenge exclusionary sex education lessons, when we don't cross dress, when we don't act on our sexual desires and curiosities, when we are ignorant about intersexuality and transgenderism, we are braiding the nooses upon which queer teens hang.

# HOMOPHOBIA IS A SAFE SEX ISSUE

Since the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, promoting "Safe Sex", or more recently "Safer Sex," has been a priority for a wide range of groups. Despite resistance from the Far Right, these efforts have been successful in educating the public, and children in particular, about the spread of STDs and the use of birth control during vaginal intercourse.

After years of activity around this initiative, we need to reexamine what truly constitutes safe sex and broaden our definition so as to deal with the entire breadth of the issue. Namely, safe sex education has been focused on the health of heterosexuals who have penile/ vaginal intercourse. Since heterosexuality is deemed the norm of sexual behavior by the vast majority of society, straight people's choices of sexual partners do not have to effect the rest of their lives, as does that choice by homosexual, bisexual, transgender, and all other queer people.

Queer people's private sexual relationships effect how they are treated by others in every aspect of their lives. To be invalidated, made invisible, harassed, taunted, and threatened is to be attacked, just as if one were punched in the mouth. Queers are not safe from any of these types of attacks.

Sexual interactions can be dangerous or deadly without the proper information. Public school sexual education classes do not teach young people how to have homosexual sex safely. Because they often refuse to discuss ways two women or two men have sex, homosex remains a taboo. By not explaining how to use barriers during oral sex, and how to use lubrication for anal sex, queer youth experimenting with sex are at greater risk of infection and injury.

Homosexual teenagers attempt to commit suicide at much higher rates than nearly any other group. Surveys consistently show 25-35% seriously attempt to kill themselves. They are at least three times more likely to try than straight youth. The violence gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth do to themselves is a direct result of the negative environment they are forced to live in.

Hugely disproportionate numbers of homosexual teenagers are homeless. Many are thrown out of their homes by their parents, others choose to leave to escape an abusive situation. Making young people homeless is violence, because it deprives them of the basic necessities for survival at an age when society doesn't expect them to be self-sufficient, and it impairs their ability to further their education in order to better provide for themselves in the future.

Gays, lesbians, transgendered, and transsexual people are kept out of many jobs because of their gender expression. This equates to lower incomes and lack of access to health care. Since they can't marry, most aren't covered on their partner's health care plans either.

And, finally, there are the outright physical assaults, beatings, and lynchings of queer people that occur everyday across the world.

All these forms of violence are related to the emotional and sexual desires of the individual. For queers to safely have sex however and with whomever they choose, all forms of homophobia and heterosexism must be eradicated. We need to plant this message deeply into people's minds. Make stencils, stickers, signs, shirts, and patches with the phrase, "Homophobia is a Safe Sex Issue!"

# RACE, THE REVOLUTION, AND YOUR STANK-ASS ARMPITS

One of the biggest shortcomings of the otherwise incredibly successful WTO and IMF protests was the relative lack of participation by people of color. There are quite a few reasons for this under-representation, it seems, but one that hasn't been discussed much is stinky armpits.

In her article "Where Was the Color In Seattle?" Elizabeth Martinez quotes an activist of color who states, "When we walked in [to the Convergence Center], the room was filled with young whites calling themselves anarchists. There was a pungent smell, many had not showered. We just couldn't relate to the scene so our whole group left right away."

On Punk Planet Online, Dan Sinker, reporting from D.C. a couple days prior to the IMF/World Bank showdown, notes, "Anarchists are singing on public transportation. It's a jaunty number—Iron fists, tear gas, prison, solidarity, freedom and love—but it's not winning the people over. Most stand uncomfortably, others look amused, other still laugh out loud and complain about the smell."

I have some first had experience with this issue as well. On April 15th, the day before the World Bank and IMF protests, as I walked with some other white activists through the predominantly Latino neighborhood of D.C. that the Direct Action Network trainings were taking place in, a friend of mine who is fluent in Spanish translated the comments of locals as we passed by. "What's up with all the stinky white people?"

While some might laugh these comments off, the issue is obviously important since it has come up so frequently. It would be silly to place the entire blame for the "lilly-white complexion" of the demonstrations on the hygiene of the activists, but from these few comments alone we can discern that 1) hygiene was one factor in preventing different activist contingents from socializing and strategizing together, that 2) it distracted some folks riding the subway from hearing the message activists were trying to get across, and 3) it was a factor in the alienation and tension between the activists and residents of the local community. If we are serious about building a movement focused in large part on the elimination of racism and classism, there is no excuse to not address an issue like this—one which numerous people of color seem to think of as, at least in part, a racial issue.

Comments like the ones above force the movement to address some tough questions. Why do white activists smell the way they do? Why is this offensive to many people of color? Is it alienating to other groups as well? What should we do about this obstacle to organizing across ethnic, class, and cultural lines?

Obviously "white activists" aren't one cohesive group. The demos were composed of college students, professionals, unionized trades workers, religious organizations, political/anarchist punks, and

numerous other groups. These diverse groups voiced their opposition in different ways—by attending educational events, by holding prayer vigils, walking in legally permitted marches, and by using highly confrontational direct action tactics. But all the previously mentioned incidents, when body odor seemed to be an issue, involved people working around the Direct Action Network and using radical tactics. The large majority of individuals in this activist segment were punks, loosely defined.

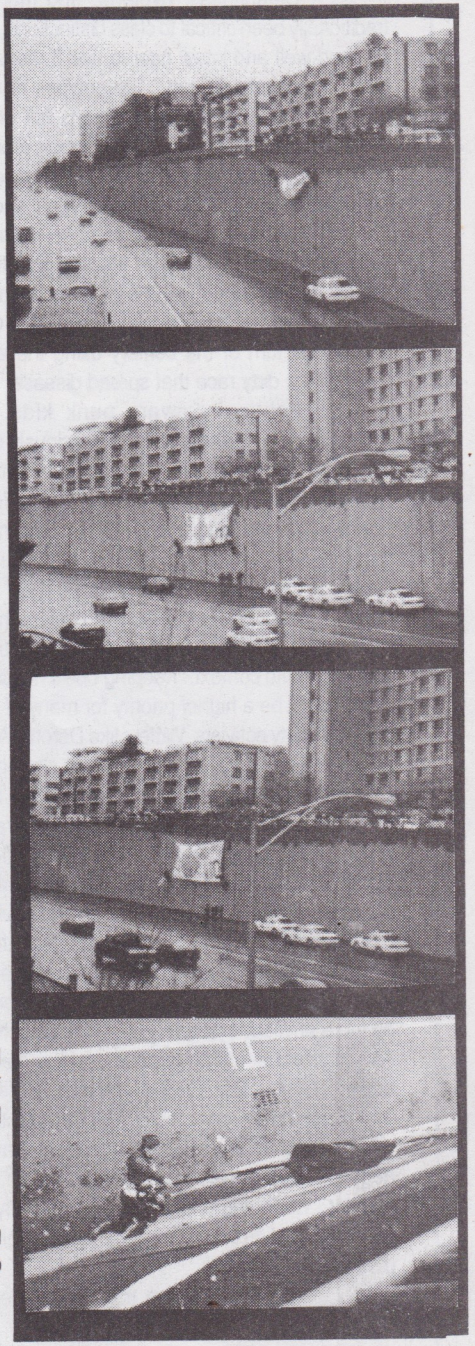
Lets be honest: it was the punks that stunk. It's a pretty sure bet that certain individual activists of all types (and all races, classes) got sweaty, but punk activists *as a group* usually smell—its widely known, punks are conscious of it, and its often intentional. It goes beyond body odor, obviously; that's just one obvious aspect of the punk aesthetic. Not only do they smell, they're often dirty, have messy hair, wear ragged clothes, and don't follow many other social norms (women with unshaven legs, people sharing food utensils, and things like that).

These attributes combined are likely to confuse and alienate just about anybody not used to them. Add to that the fact that the vast majority of punk activists are white, and it becomes pretty understandable why many of people of color don't feel immediately comfortable when a couple thousand of these people are milling around! So the real question to ask is "Why do *punk* activists look, smell, and act the way they do?"

1) Its a bi-product of the lifestyle of the direct action activist. That is, lots of people working together in tight spaces, having limited access to showers, not being able to change clothes everyday, marching in the hot sun, and making puppets and signs with paint, wood, and other messy materials. This is part of the answer, but it doesn't entirely explain how non-punk activists keep themselves clean, and why punks are still dirty and smelly when they're not protesting and are at home.

2) Its environmentally conscious and anti-consumerist to stink. Showering takes lots of water. Deoderants and soaps are tested on animals, block natural body processes, and are a waste of money. Having lots of clothing is unnecessary and wasteful and supports sweatshops. Sharing utensils is eco-friendly.

3) Most importantly for many punk activists (and most interestingly, for this discussion), smelling bad, being dirty, and transgressing behavioral norms are visual symbols of the activists' objection to their race and class positions within society.



Cleanliness, hygiene, and manners have traditionally been critical to class distinctions. Aristocrats dressed well and knew how to use 8 utensils each at meals; peasants did not. Stereotypes of white trash are based around images of lawns full of junk, kids playing in dirt, and men wearing shabby, grease stained clothes. Hygiene is a common theme in racist stereotypes as well. One hundred years ago, soap ads commonly referenced the need to clean African-Americans, figuratively and literally, by altering their morals and by scrubbing the pigment from their skin. Chinese immigrants were driven out of West Coast cities around the turn of the century using the excuse that they were a dirty race that spread disease.

Politically aware punk kids are often intentionally dirty and smelly. Consciously or not, they use their unwillingness to meet dominant norms of hygiene as a marker of defiance and rejection of those norms and the racist and classist traditions they are rooted in.

Recalling this history of race and class oppression built around issues of hygiene helps to put the feelings of some people of color towards dirty white protestors into context. Keeping one's house and body clean might be a higher priority for many of the people put-off by dirty activists. Writers like Dorothy Allison have discussed this as a specific survival strategy of many oppressed groups in this country. They argue that people at the bottom of the social hierarchy also understand the importance of cultural signifiers. Being clean, smelling good, and wearing stylish new clothes symbolizes many things: that they are hard working, that they care about their property, that they accept dominant values, and that they are similar and familiar to white middle class people. These behaviors are used by more privileged people to distinguish between what Allison refers to as "good poor" and the "bad poor." It seems possible that many of the individuals in Seattle and Washington who "couldn't relate to the scene" viewed keeping clean as an important way to prove negative stereotypes false and an indicator of self-respect. Not being one of them, I obviously can't say for sure. I'm just offering possible insight into the dynamics at work.

In a broad sense the stink issue is one of different social groups using opposite signs to make the same point—that racism and classism are wrong and injurious. Scholar Noel Ignitiev characterizes whiteness as a club that one is kicked out of if she or he doesn't follow the rules. White punks are repudiating their privileged position—denouncing the club—by acting outside of its norms. On the other hand, some poor people and people of color might consciously prioritize cleanliness and hygiene as a means of rejecting the negative images of themselves that whites have created

and are trying to prove the supposed grounds for discrimination as baseless and ludicrous.

Some punks have suggested that dressing the part, not adhering to standards of hygiene, dying one's hair bright colors, and other symbolic statements of dissent might act as coded sandwich board, announcing unmistakably that "I'm a race traitor—an ally." In her article "Not Just Posing for the Postcard," in the April/May issue of the political magazine *Clamor*, white punk activist Amanda Luker

writes, "In my dream, people of color will see me and not think how weird I look, but recognize me as a friend." Amanda recounts a meeting where a black community organizer picks her out of a crowd of white college students because of her appearance, and says, "Well, just looking at you all, I can tell you're down. Especially her."

This incident is sure to give many well-intentioned white activists hope for the potential bonds of solidarity to be formed between punks and other cultural deviants, and communities of color.

However, the reactions in DC and Seattle indicate that the communities punks hope to bond with either don't understand the message, or disregard it as useless. Perhaps some even find it patronizing. Clearly, it is going to take considerably more than wardrobe choices to convince many people of color and poor Americans that punks are strong allies in the fight against racism and economic injustice. In fact, their reactions show that these lifestyle choices might keep potential allies apart if they aren't addressed quickly and seriously.

While this historic association of hygiene issues with racism and classism may have been an obstacle to coalition building across race and class lines, punk activists' appearance and smell also proved to be a hindrance to working with other white middle class activists. Punks activists probably seemed as completely foreign and alienating to middle-class white college students as they did to some people of color. I witnessed this personally, when I went to the IMF protests with a van load of non-punk college activists. Since I had one foot in each of those groups, I felt like I played mediator and tour guide. But its crucial to note that the groups that felt somewhat out of place did so because they were in the minority. If a bunch of crusty anarchist punks walked into a room filled with hundreds of collegiate anti-sweatshop activists listening to the Indigo Girls and talking about getting back in time for finals, they probably would feel out of place and uncomfortable also. They'd probably feel incredibly self-conscious as a small minority amongst thousands of people from different race and class backgrounds.

What is clear is that white punk activists absolutely need to discuss these issues with the activists and community members who are members of minority ethnic groups or are poor whites. This might be difficult because people from all parties involved are often very sensitive about such personal issues.

I think punk activists should seriously consider the possibility of modifying their appearance, odor, etc. in some instances for the greater political end. Sometimes cultural, symbolic politics need to take a back seat to doing whatever it takes to organize large numbers of people from different backgrounds. Any experienced organizer will tell you that you want to minimize antagonisms, and maximize commonalities between yourself and those you are trying to reach. Writing about the historic Lawrence Textile strike in her autobiography, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn says, "We did not discuss religion and warned all speakers, regardless of their personal views, not to offend the religious feelings of the people." Gurley Flynn was at that time an IWW organizer, and many of the IWW leaders were atheists, but for practical purposes, they didn't wear that fact on their sleeves, since the workers they were

organizing were devoutly religious.

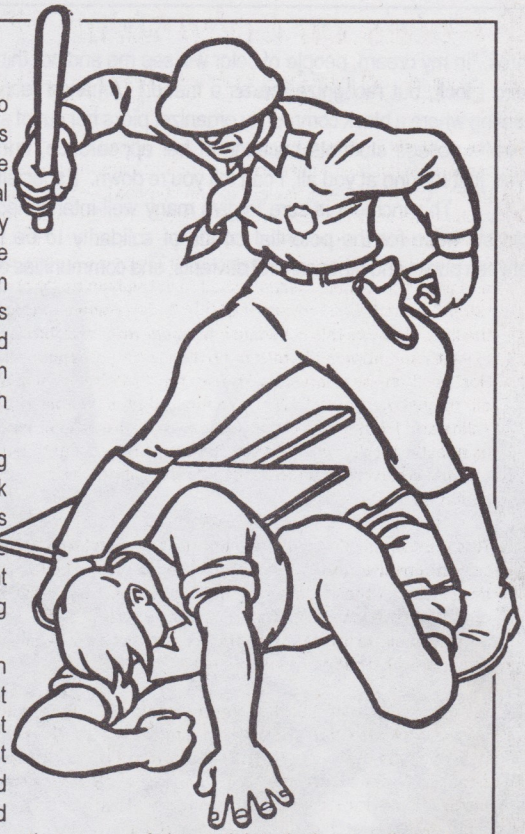
On the other hand, people certainly should not have to sacrifice important parts of their identities indefinitely. Punk culture is a culture with its own norms of behavior, appearance and speech, like other sub-cultural groups. It should be respected as other cultural forms are. There are obstacles to trying to solve the problems solely by cleaning up some activists appearances, anyway. Such large numbers of people were able to turn out for these demonstrations, in part, because the organizers were able to provide free food and places to stay, which greatly minimized the costs individual protestors would have to bear to take part. The crash spaces, however, were often nothing more than a spot on the concrete floor of a warehouse, which no shower, no place to do laundry, etc.

In the end, changing clothes and hygiene alone is not going to unite the disparate groups working together. Activists must work seriously and directly on issues that immediately affect the communities they seek to work with. They also need to make the actions accessible to accommodate participants' specific needs. If current activists want to have more working families participate, for instance, childcare during organizing sessions and the action needs to be a higher priority.

The demonstrations at the Republican National Convention seem to have bridged many of the gaps between these different communities by working on more local issues and by creating different types of actions so people to participate in the ones that felt most comfortable to them. For example, the Direct Action Network worked in solidarity with the Kensington Welfare Union, which is composed mainly of poor people of color, to highlight that fact that extreme poverty certainly still exists despite the "New Economy." Hopefully these types of steps forward will bring out larger contingencies from groups other than punks, so one culture of opposition doesn't seem to overwhelm others at convergence sites and on the streets.

Its important that local chapters of the larger Direct Action Network and other groups who have put together the recent mass actions work together with progressive groups based in the neighborhoods—not just when an major demo is going to take place in their city, but continuously, and symbiotically. This means that anarchists and punk activists shouldn't just beg organizations based in the struggles of poor communities to come out to events they set up. They need to make themselves available to participate in actions organized and lead by people of color. They need to do this on the terms established by the local organizers, and not try to "hijack" the demonstrations with more militant chants and tactics. The time and place to push for more militancy is in planning sessions after all groups involved have gained one another's trust and respect.

There are other issues too. Elizabeth Martinez's quote shows



that many of the activists in her contingent weren't familiar with the concepts of anarchism, as a serious historical political theory. Basic knowledge about different ideologies needs to be spread out of the punk and anarchist scenes and into other communities non-dogmatically and not superficially. This requires better distribution of publications and changes to the self-righteous and ultra-militant tone many of the current periodicals exude. More drippy spray painted circle A's on the sides of buildings ain't going to cut it.

I offer these observations and ideas in an effort to make the movement for social justice more affective. I plan to distribute this piece to a number of organizations currently involved in the struggle as a means of initiating a conversation that will, I certainly hope, prove unifying rather than divisive.

# Notes on Columbine, Teen Angst, and Authentic Rebellion

Any analysis of the Columbine shootings premised on the belief that suburban teen anger and unhappiness are baseless, is as prematurely dead and useless as the corpses Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left scattered around their school. Yet, two years later, there remains a dearth of serious theoretical discussion surrounding the issues Columbine raises (why they did it, who's to blame, and what the killings "mean") outside of the insultingly shallow, "Stop the madness!" coverage of USA Today, People Magazine, and the like. Perhaps this is because thinkers with true commitments to youth and human liberation must assert a precarious "Neither/Nor" position—as anarchists, Trotskyists, and other "Third Way"ers did throughout the Cold War. We must, that is, *neither* support killing and injuring dozens of youth as an expression of emotion and as a tactic *nor* demurely accept the vacuous and lonely, homophobic, and conformist culture of 21st Century Middle-class American suburbia.

This is a complicated task, and we can't be absolutely sure that our conclusions are correct, since the protagonists are dead. But surely, if we examine the evidence left behind, as well as current trends affecting American youth cultures, from a radical perspective, we'll be able to come up with answers at least somewhat more satisfying and helpful than those available now.

We must remember that the primary goals of capitalists are not only to maximize profit, but also to reproduce and maintain the conditions that allow for this maximization of profit. In less developed political regimes this is done through the exercise of brutal, coercive force by the state and private militias against the poor and political dissidents. Political and cultural theorists argue that in countries like the U.S. dominant groups maintain the conditions that serve their interests through the more sophisticated means of hegemonic control.

British theorist Dick Hebdige (quoting Stuart Hall) explains:

> The term hegemony refers to a situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert 'total social authority" over other subordinate groups. Not simply by coercion or by the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but by "winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural." Hegemony can only be maintained so long as the dominant classes "succeed in framing all competing definitions within their range," so that subordinate groups are, if not controlled; then at least contained within an ideological space which does not seem at all "ideological": which appears instead to be permanent and "natural," to lie outside history, to be beyond particular interests.

Which is to say that hegemony is the social control of a population through the process of convincing that population that it is in fact free, so the population does not feel compelled to resist. The recent science fiction film *The Matrix* serves as a useful allegory for understanding the concept. In the film humans are slaves to a sentient robotic race that uses humans as an energy source. The humans do not resist their subservience because a sophisticated computer program leads them to believe they continue to live in the modern world before the existence of the robotic life forms. Therefore any type of dissent or resistance to the social conditions of their lives that the humans may engage in, does nothing to challenge their true dominance by the robotic life forms, since that dissent is limited to the realm of the computer simulated virtual world.

Though humans today do not function as batteries for intelligent robots, we do function in a system where we do not live up to our full potentials, where we are used as raw materials in a reckless economic system that needs our subordination and compliance to function properly. We live in a class society that attempts to appear classless. Complicated social hierarchies of race, sex, and many other aspects of identity, continue to limit and oppress individuals and groups. Thus, to ensure the acceptance of such a situation, our worldview is carefully manipulated through limited media coverage, confined debate and commentary, and forms of entertainment that keep us passive and constantly consuming.

Hall goes on to explain that, "Hegemony...is not universal and "given" to the continuing rule of a particular class. It has to be won, reproduced, sustained." The theorist who originally conceived of hegemony, Antonio Gramsci, refers to it as a "moving equilibrium," meaning that dominant groups must constantly adjust and react to events that might challenge the system.

Therefore, we should see the shallowness of the mediated public response to the Columbine killings as the maneuvering of dominant groups to prevent and circumvent a more truthful and realistic explanation of the events that indicts the true systems and benefactors of power for their roles in the shootings.

But it is crucial to examine the functioning of hegemony not only in reaction to the killings, but also as a *catalyst* to them. In fact, we argue that the Columbine shootings were a reaction to legitimate social concerns that were and continue to be held by many people of similar age and social position to Harris and Klebold. What makes the situation unique is that the shooters expressed themselves through a method outside the limits of spectacular society, outside the matrix of acceptable, controlled dissent. Though the boys themselves are ultimately responsible for their acts, an explanation as to why they carried out the killings lies first in the conditions of life that angered and upset them in the first place, and, secondly, their perceived lack of other methods to express and deal with these conditions.

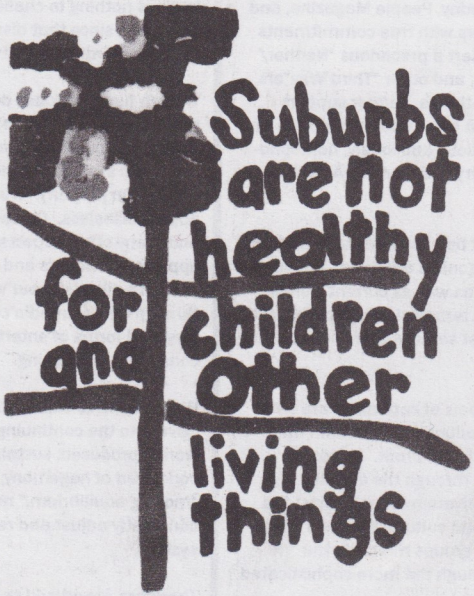
To better understand Klebold and Harris' actions, we first have to examine the conditions they were reacting to, and discuss two

very different understandings of "teen angst."

Though most people don't know it, since it was conspicuously left out of nearly all the thousands of news accounts about the incident, one of the killers left an explanatory suicide note. The note read, in part:

> Your children who ridiculed me, who have treated me like I am not worth their time are dead...Surely you will try to blame it on the clothes I wear, the music I listen to, or the way I choose to present myself, but no. Do not hide behind my choices. You need to face the fact that this comes as a result of YOUR CHOICES. Parents and teachers, you fucked up. You have taught these kids to be gears and sheep. To think and act like those who came before them, to not accept what is different. YOU ARE IN THE WRONG.

A number of things are clear from these few lines. First, the boys were treated disrespectfully by many of their peers. Interviews with acquaintances of Klebold and Harris after the fact confirm that the boys were verbally harassed and physically threatened regularly by other students who considered themselves higher on the microcosmic social hierarchy of Columbine High School. Accounts claim that much of the harassment was focused around their choice of clothes and personal style, and also was heavily homophobic, with sexist overtones.




These reports come as no surprise to high school students across the country whose stylistic choices, often related to their participation in youth subcultures, mark them as targets for abuse by their peers. Additionally, teens that don't follow accepted codes of gender appearance and behavior are mocked and attacked, often without any repercussions to their tormentors. After the massacre, an issue of *Brat*, a magazine written and produced by teens in Louisville, Kentucky featured articles from high schoolers around the country that sympathized with Klebold and Harris, because they were similarly targeted. The number of copycat attempts following Columbine also attests to the fact that Klebold and Harris' experiences were hardly isolated incidents.

But the note shows that more than their school day harassment was at issue. The shooters lay responsibility for their classmates' attitudes and action on the parents and teachers. Though not particularly articulately, they reject the conformist culture they have been brought up in. They refer to the other students, and by implication the adults as well, as "gears and sheep." So it seems likely that many other issues—serious issues related to power and identity—lay below the surface of what is said in this short note.

But of course, it is hardly surprising to hear those types of sentiments coming from high school students. In fact, they have become something of a cliché. Wearing clothes that parents find unattractive or embarrassing, writing "dark" poetry about the meaningless of life, or loneliness, or the ugliness of people, and other generally "anti-social" behavior is all summed up in the broad and dismissive invective *Teen Angst*.

As cultural radicals concerned with working towards just power relations and a meaningful, authentic, anti-corporate culture, we need to examine the conventional wisdom regarding the phenomenon referred to as "teen angst," and determine what role such a characterization plays in maintaining dominant ideologies.

*Angst* is a particularly interesting word, one that lies somewhere near the etymological crossroads of *anger*, *anxiety*, and *anguish*. Substituting any of those three options would make for a much less general, and more descriptive explanation of the teens' emotional state. Using it obfuscates these distinctions.

Typically, any form of dissent or non-conformity is written off as a "stage" that all teens go through, as natural as loosing one's baby teeth. Radio psychologists, family therapists, and TV sitcoms alike usually explain it as rebelliousness stemming from a breakdown in communications and struggle for autonomy between generations in a family. While more freedom from parental restrictions is often one thing that teenagers seek, this explanation is highly reductive. It paints the teenagers concerns about lack of community, social pressures, and other issues as unimportant. Those who persist in criticizing the status quo are written off as "idealists," and suggestions for change offered by young people are openly rejected as the naïve and unrealistic ramblings of those lacking "life-experience." It is implied that middle class teens shouldn't complain or criticize, since they have it good. In this way, a spectrum of concerns is reduced to the least threatening—the parent/child conflict, which is depicted as essentially biological.

The story of Harris and Klebold's shooting spree, from this perspective, can only become a story of teen angst gone "too far." The paucity of this standard conception of teen angst is shown clearly in the futile attempts parents and pundits made, after the fact, to explain what possibly could have made these two teenagers different from the rest. "How could this happen *here*?" was the standard refrain, as parents began the (by now routine) process of shuffling through pop-culture products, trying to track down a believable culprit. By changing the discussion to the availability of weaponry, they eventually circumvented the "Why?"

discussion altogether, moving on to the "how." Comedian Chris Rock (also a social commentator, as all good comedians are) chalks it up to pure insanity. "What ever happened to crazy?" he cackled on a post shooting HBO stand-up special. "Everyone's trying to come up with an explanation. They were just crazy! Good old fashioned CRAZY."

But we know that these boys weren't "just crazy." Mental illness doesn't suddenly afflict two friends and manipulate them to conspire. We don't have to throw our hands up in submission like this if we start from a different, more accurate, premise—a different conception of teen angst. That premise is simply this: Teen angst is the state of sensing that the world is fucked up, but not yet being able to prove it.

It follows that having recently developed that capacity to think critically, many teenagers constantly question the validity of the rest of the world's assumptions, truisms, and beliefs. They might not have a fully articulated understanding of how power works, what they find lacking in their culture, or why they find Parental Advisory stickers on their CDs so offensive, but most adults don't either. The difference is that having not yet been fully assimilated, having not been bludgeoned on the head with corporate culture for forty years, and having not been told enough times to refrain from questioning they naturally find glaring inconsistencies, hypocrisies, injustices, and much senselessness in the world. So they begin to express confusion, resentment, and dissention.

If this is true, it's easy to see why it is so important for teen anger and teen questioning, to be modified into the standard conception of teen angst. It is a crucial part of this process of assimilation into the "matrix" of limited perceptions that shapes what we consider "reality." It helps to dissuade young people from further exploring their very real concerns, and keeps them from attempting to make real changes.

Reinterpreting the cause of teen angst is one way to prevent teens from moving towards challenging the social order. The second critical way their dissent is managed, is by deflecting actual resistance into symbolic resistance expressed through style.

Teenagers have among the tactics availavle for dealing with their dissent, two main options. Many times they are used in conjunction, as compliments to each other. The first is to join, create, or work towards a way of living that makes more sense, that is just, and that feels more honest; these alternatives, naturally, are often in opposition to the status quo. This is often difficult to do, especially when still in the incredibly difficult process of sorting out the way the world created by previous generations functions. The second option is much easier: using shock value.

Shock Value is a tactic—a weapon—that has been used historically in cultural wars as well as in inter-familial power struggles. A working definition of shock value is *the effect created by a person transgressing social norms not out of an authentic identification with the transgressive act, but instead simply to ferociously and unmistakably reject the status quo.*

To reiterate, sometimes people wear something, or act a certain way because they authentically like the way it feels to do so. Other times people wear things or act certain ways because they like the fact that dressing or acting that way is not socially acceptable, and they feel the desperate desire to immediately break free from the limits imposed upon them, whether or not they personally truly enjoy the action or style.

The dominant culture has traditionally been able to accommodate many of these transgressions—altering enough to allow men to wear long hair, whites to dance to black music, and teenagers to express their sexuality—often making enormous profits as they do so, by turning the symbols of opposition (clothes, music, magazines) into mass produced objects. In the process, marketers of mass culture commodify rebellion and teen angst, and turn them primarily into a set of market interactions.

Mainstream companies own clean-cut, mainstream youth culture. It is sold in stores like *Abercrombie and Fitch* and *Banana Republic*. Major record labels like Capital and EMI put out records from groups like the Backstreet Boys and Mandy Moore. But, increasingly, the same companies, or at least different companies that function nearly identically, produce products for young people who consider themselves outside of, and nominally opposed to, the mainstream. They sell from stores like *Gadzooks* and *Hot Topic*. Record labels like Epitaph sell "punk" records at the Sam Goody in the mall, and other companies sell the image of a dangerous urban life through rap CDs and magazines. On top of this, writes Naomi Klein in her book *No Logo*, today, "for brands to be truly cool, they need to layer [an] uncool-equals-cool aesthetic...onto their pitch: they need to self-mock, talk back to themselves while they are talking, be used and new simultaneously."

Youth culture peddlers create the illusion of mainstream versus alternative, good kids versus bad kids, and corporate versus independent. For example, the supposed bad boys of music, Eminem and Fred Dunst of Limp Bizkit ridicule Christina Aguilara and her music as fake and commercial, when they are on the same record labels, play the same type of stadium shows, and get promoted through the same radio stations and music press.

Remember, Hall and Hebdige argue that "Hegemony can only be maintained so long as the dominant classes succeed in framing all competing definitions within their range." And that, it seems, is exactly what the culture (entertainment and fashion) industries, have done. The fact that mainstream teens and parents take issue with deviant teens' appearances and behavior only confirms the effectiveness of the system. It creates a false conflict to keep the parties preoccupied, so they don't challenge the actual power structure. They are safely contained.

This has been a continuous cyclical process with all new youth culture trends since World War Two, argues Hebdige. But, in the last decade the process has been sped up and made nearly inescapable, due to changing market trends and advertising techniques. In *No Logo*, Klein argues that in the early 1990s clothing marketers realized that the "global youth" market was finally more lucrative than the baby boomer market, and began the endless pursuit of "coolness," in order to capture that market. In so doing, marketers sought out and attempted to cash in on every noticeable niche of original style, regardless of what that

style was originally intended to represent. Thus the mainstream steals back any objects that young people try to imbue with new meaning. Today, it does it at such a rate that new subcultures barely begin to be articulated before they are capitalized on and corrupted.

These false pretensions of rebelliousness and choice can't remain unnoticed forever. It is becoming increasingly clear to many young people that the companies that produce their cultural goods are a crucial part of the social order they are rejecting. One can't embrace the claws of a monster in order to escape its teeth. And so some see their only option as embracing pop culture ironically: knowing that sitcoms, movies, and "alternative bands" are insincere and cheesy, and thus appreciating them for their camp value.

Additionally, shock value has been further drained of its power lately through the intense marketing of so-called "extreme" sports, bands and beverages, and through marketing stunts to capture the attention of consumers. Further, talk shows like Jerry Springer, Rikki Lake, and Jenny Jones thrive because the studio and at-home audiences derive pleasure from witnessing (and then chastising and ridiculing) real people transgress social codes. But as the shows compete with one another, and try not to present original topics, they spiral down into presenting ever more outlandish appearances, behaviors, and lifestyles. While a teenager with a tongue piercing or tattoo would have elicited harsh recriminations from talk show audiences seven years ago, now such a thing is not even worthy of mention unless, says, that tongue piercing got caught on the genital piercing of the kid's sister's boyfriend, who had impregnated his cousin three weeks before.

**For every action there is ~~an equal and opposite reaction.~~ a corporate sponsor.**

The unintentional side effect of such shows is the normalization of behavior that is most palatable. This can have positive effects in society—such as normalizing homosexuality and bi-sexuality. But, if shock value is a tactic used by young people, talk shows, and other "extreme" entertainment also lessens the impact of their attempts at symbolic breaks from the mainstream. In essence, talk show guests transgress all the easily transgressable social norms before teens can use them to their own advantage.

Young people who have issues, whether they be the predictable ones of wanting more freedom from their parent's rules, or of an more societal nature—sexism, racism, lack of meaning and beauty in their lives—and who might have traditionally relied on shock value and alternative culture to express their opinions, are left with no where to turn. What can they buy that is authentically different, when "authentically different" is just the thing that all the major companies are trying to capture with their styles?

The answer, we might see, is for the kids to move outside the realm of the stylistic and cultural. If they truly want to change social institutions, they need to correctly analyze how capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and other systems of power function, than organize to fundamentally change and replace them. But that's a pretty tall order—these are social systems that are still confounding to people who have earned PhD's studying them for decades. So while the "end of shock value" may seem of little importance (or even a positive development) to us, it should be easy to see why it makes the situation look hopelessly fucked to them. It seems their only choice is to be one of the archetypical clichéd outsiders in the romantic teen comedy.

So, while many may be content to give irony a good college-try, and others decide to take the easy way, and forget any inklings of criticism, a few are left with the difficult task of being real, of truly rebelling in a world where that is daily becoming more and more impossible. As shock value is drained of its power and alternate forms of cultural expression are monopolized by capitalistic enterprises, youth attempting to rebel have to seek more extreme forms of expression and behavior—ones that are beyond the reach of the cool industries trying to market (and thus co-opt) rebellion.

The Columbine killings, we argue, are an example of this behavior. Shooting white middle class teenagers and teachers, and attempting to blow up a school is not (yet) commodifiable, not something easily made to seem cool, not something that can be used in the next Nike commercial to sell shoes. Therefore, it is an act of authentic expression—of rebellion—outside the realm of the market, outside of the spectacle.

The Columbine shootings aren't the only example of this type of reaction. We can read the riots at the most recent Woodstock festival the same way. The festival was billed as a somewhat "alternative" youth cultural experience, with implied ties to the subversive undercurrents of the original event, where people were expecting to be able to get crazy and be free. But the festival, of course, turned out to be a tightly controlled environment shaped to make the organizers and financial backers hordes of money. No matter how different the bands sounded from Michael Jackson or John Mellancamp, Woodstock wasn't an alternative to anything...until the concert goers destroyed the sales stalls, looted supply trucks and set the place on fire. That was authentic action outside of the planned scope of the event. That was "extreme," that was "real" while the bands and the organizers' intentions weren't. The promoters don't deserve a bit of sympathy from us. They promised something different, something authentic, and something real, but their words were hollow and disingenuous. They got the fire they pretended to sell.

Since the traditional social structure hasn't yet figured out how to control and cash in on these actions with their standard methods, it can only reinterpret these events and forcefully shift public

opinion away from the meaning and impetus of the acts.

Interestingly, this breakdown in hegemonic control was immediately followed by increased physical domination—more cops in schools, more dress codes, and more electronic surveillance. Teenagers who were dressed differently were randomly harassed, attacked, suspended, and even expelled, both as a form of vengeance and supposedly as a precaution against them committing similar acts. This is a good indication of the complimentary roles played by force and hegemony in social control; when the preferred method looses ground temporarily, the other rushes in to plug the crack.

The Columbine shootings were ultimately an extreme example of shock value, since less extreme methods had been worn out—recuperated—by dominant culture. As radicals, we reject the current system and seek to create a new one. Many of us know the emptiness living in ugly modern suburbs leaves us with. Many of us also know what it feels like to be ridiculed and attacked in schools or other social settings. From this position we should be able to understand why Harris and Klebold felt the need to rebel. But from this position it should also be clear that the methods they used were both unethical and ineffective.

Shock value is ultimately reformist, not revolutionary. It opens space, registers dissent, and pushes boundaries, sometimes forcing the culture to be more accepting. But marketers of identity usually quickly colonize the space it creates, and thus it simply serves to expand the reach of the spectacle. Real struggle is self-conscious. It goes beyond shock and innovation in aesthetics. If something is truly alternative it must be based on alternative values, and create alternate institutions to work outside of and against current mainstream ones.

We should view the Columbine killings as an indicator of the shortcomings of our movements for social justice. Though we have various frameworks to critique dominant society and we have articulated some solutions and alternatives, these ideas are not even close to being as prominent and accessible as they need to be. It was widely reported that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had been in contact with right wing white supremacist organizations prior to their killing spree. Groups like that are always eager to cash in on the frustrations and confusions of teens, and offer their fascist theories as an explanatory model that affirms the teens' dissatisfaction. We, of course, should in no way manipulate non-conformist teens into uncritically subscribing to left-wing ideas. But we do absolutely need to make those types of analysis available and interesting. Even more importantly, we need to offer strategic solutions to the actual problems young people face that go beyond the realm of shock value and rebellious culture in order to address the root issues on hand.

The anti-globalization movement is a good example of this. Protestors in Seattle, DC, and Prague also found the system to be unjust, violent, and contrary to their interests. The majority of the most confrontational protestors were also in their teens and twenties. Think of the potential the Black Bloc would offer to marketers of teen angst—it is exciting, extreme, has its own vocabulary, music, and a distinct, original style. Yet it can't be marketed, because it is directly contrary to the interests of capital. It is difficult for the Gap to sell clothes with images of people burning down the Gap. The globalization protestors, however, didn't kill other young people who are in the same social predicament, like the Columbine shooters did. They're actions have actually affected debates and hopefully will make positive impacts on policy and continue to ignite a larger movement for social and ecological justice.

As young people and radicals we need to organize fellow young people, help them articulate their anger, and help them prove that their suspicions that the world is fucked up have been right all along. And then we need to help them channel that anger into proactive, productive methods of fighting the real enemy, instead of searching desperately for new types of shock value that only further alienate them from the world they truly want to live in.

New York Times article 5/24/99

**By KEVIN SACK**

NEWNAN, Ga., May 21 — The members of the Coweta County Board of Education are not naïve enough to think that they vanquished school violence two weeks ago when they voted to prohibit students from carrying book bags unless the bags were transparent or made of mesh.

But at least it is something, they say. And after last month's deadly attack in Littleton, Colo., and now Thursday's shootings in Conyers, Ga., school officials and political leaders here and around the country feel an urgency to do something, to do anything, really, that will ease the anxieties of students and parents.

In such a frantic atmosphere, the pressure to act is increasingly winning out over concerns about privacy and constitutionality.

"We've got to let the kids know who's in charge of the schools," said Michael E. Sumner, a Newnan lawyer who is chairman of the school board in Coweta County, about 45 miles southwest of Atlanta. "And if that means we're infringing on somebody's individual freedom of expression, then so be it.

"There's been some criticism that, well, where does it end? And my point would be that I don't know where it ends but it's sure going to begin with book bags. Just because we can't do everything to make our schools absolutely safe doesn't mean we shouldn't take the first step."

Mr. Sumner's attitude is far from unique. Since the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, school boards, county commissions and state legislatures across the country have proposed and enacted a broad series of measures intended to attack the youth violence problem at the margins. In each case, the proponents acknowledge that their actions are not cure-alls and that a more enduring solution will require sweeping reassessments of today's youth culture and its countless corrupting influences.

# ::Subculture, Activism, and Academia::

I've been thinking a lot about my identity lately, since I'm trying to evaluate what is important in my life and what I want to do with myself. Some where around my junior year of college I suddenly realized that I was definitely changing. My interests were broadening, I was spending a good deal of time with people I'd have snubbed a year or two before, and I was spending less time doing the things that had once mattered to me most—playing music, going to shows, writing zines, and hanging out.

When I first took a step back from my super busy schedule to notice this I freaked out a bit. It was like the scene in Teenwolf when Scotty notices long tufts of hair growing out of the backs of his hands. When something about you is changing, and its not a result of some conscious decision you've made, your first instinct is to yell, "What the fuck is going on here?!" and do whatever you can to make it stop.

But eventually Scotty realized there were plenty of benefits to being a Teenwolf—he could surf on top of vans and play basketball really well. What he was changing into wasn't really that bad, he just needed to be conscious of it and more in control. And after a while I realized that it's the same way with me.

I used to identify as a punk or a hardcore kid. I felt like that category pretty much summed up my identity, and I was comfortable thinking about myself that way. But now, after four years of college, and lots of work in the labor, Affirmative Action, anti-prison, and anti-globalization movements, I identify as something more complex. Something along the lines of a *radical academic punk activist.*

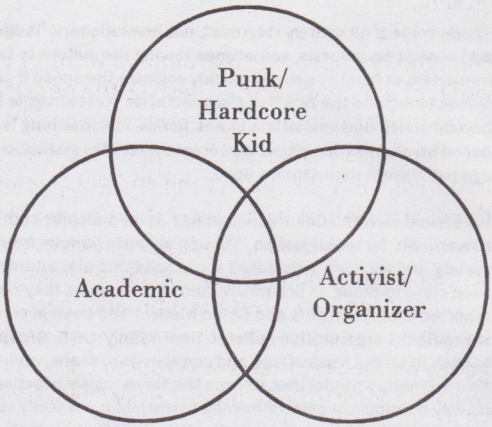



**Figure 1.**
**Venn Diagram representing the intersectionality of Andrew Cornell.**

Sometimes I feel a bit like a walking Venn diagram—you know, those charts with the intersecting circles from high school science class. I can believably play any of these roles—punk/hardcore kid, student/cultural theory buff, activist/organizer—separately, and I'm eager to talk with and learn from people coming from each of these perspectives. But I feel most complete, most understood, and most at home with those that, like me, exist in the intersection of these lifestyles, roles, and perspectives.

In Women's Studies courses they often talk about the "intersectionality" of women's (or men's) lives. The categories most often discussed in that context are gender, race, and class. Intersectionality means that you can't talk, for instance, about all women just as women, because the other aspects of their lives (like race and gender) also have huge impacts on who they are that you can't ever completely separate out or ignore. It means that one category they fit into might be at odds with another category. The classic example from my classes is: women of color might want to organize

with men of color to fight racism, but in so doing they might have to deal with the men of color's sexism. Categories of race, class, and gender are huge aspects of my personality as well, and I discuss them at length elsewhere in this zine. But the concept of intersectionality definitely applies on a personal level with the punk/academic/activist categories also, since all those identities are incredibly important to me, but the groups of people associated with them are often at odds with each other. I've come to realize that I really need all three in my life. Each one fills in where the others are lacking.

Punk gives me a culture—a set of values, a community of people I feel bonded with, a broader vision of a more satisfying lifestyle, the beginnings of independent institutions. It gives me an identity and an alternative aesthetics that appeals to me. In many ways it is the seed of the end goal I envision—the goal for which all my work is supposed to lead up to. Punk is passion, its idealism, it gives me a sense of hope and urgency and possibilities.

Academia gives me a broader base of knowledge and gives me the history of how things got to be the way they are. (Wouldn't it be awesome to have a history book titled, "How Everything Got So Fucked Up"?) It forces me to articulate my beliefs. It is systematic and rational. It teaches me how to prove things, and win arguments with people who disagree with me. It introduces me to people who I wouldn't have otherwise spoken with who share some of the ideas and goals I do. It gives me new words to describe new ideas. It is theoretical. It is important because action needs to be based on thought.

Activism is strategic, it is reasoned, and it requires discipline, commitment, and hard work. It brings a sense of accomplishment. It connects me with people of very different backgrounds than my own. It actually challenges authority. It moves beyond the cultural and beyond the personal. It puts words into action. It gives me a sense of purpose, and it is a pursuit that I feel good about dedicating my time too.

I realized I naturally started changing because I needed to, because I wasn't fulfilled being just a hardcore kid anymore. Now I'm trying to seek a balance of the things important to me, which definitely is not easy. It's weird to say, "No I'm not going to the Modest Mouse show, I've got to stay here and read three chapters of *The Visual Culture Reader*." Or, on the other hand to say, "No, I'm not going to that rally, I really *need* to go see Catharsis play."

But I'm really glad that I'm at least trying to work it all out because the alternative seems utterly depressing. I know so many people that have gotten to the same point as me—they see too many contradictions in the DIY music scene, it doesn't do enough to stimulate them anymore, and they start to question its importance and usefulness. So a lot of people five up on it completely, and walk away from it. But I think too often that leaves a hole too. And it's a hard hole to fill because meaningful, passionate culture is in somewhat short supply these days. And besides it takes a long time to really feel a part of a group like that.

The problem, it seems to me, is that subcultures are really rooted in the structural conditions of our lives—to things like living at your parent's house and going to high school. So when those conditions change, we're left fumbling for how hardcore (or whatever subculture you are involved in) fits into your life. The truth is that it *can't* play the exact same role, and you will just get disillusioned with it if you try to force it to. But that doesn't mean it can't play *some* role. We need to have new ways to conceive of punk. We need to make it fit us, instead of limiting ourselves so we can continue to fit it.

In the article on punk as ethnicity, I offer some further thoughts on this. But before that I want to throw out some tangential ideas that popped into my head while I've been writing this.

## ::Subculture and Activism::

You might ask why I think of hardcore and activism as two distinct parts of my life. Doesn't being punk entail being an activist? I used to think it did as well, but now I realize that while there might be some overlap, they're not totally the same. In high school they pretty much were the same for me, for a few reasons. First, the hardcore I listened to—Born Against, Spitboy, Ebullition stuff—was explicitly political. Secondly, there wasn't any real visible political organizing going on in my small hometown outside of what punk kids were doing (like passing out PETA pamphlets). And finally, being a punk with any degree of self-righteousness and pride at my school necessarily entailed being an activist. Challenging homophobia, fighting with preachy Christian teachers, wearing controversial clothes that the school tried to prohibit, correcting patriotic history, being straight-edge, being anti-consumerist, and having self-confidence in the face of constant harassment were all ways of challenging power structures, which is one way to define activism.

But after leaving high school I found out that there was ton of activism outside of punk. There are people of different generations and backgrounds doing activism. It was weird to walk into my friend Peter's bedroom—on one wall he had a big poster of Che Guevara, but the opposite wall was covered with hockey posters. That fucked with me because all the radicals I knew thought hockey was totally stupid and wrong. That hockey was itself something to fight against, or at least "hockey loving culture" or something. Then I met Ethyl who is my grandmother's age, a member the elderly radical group The Grey Panthers, and who wears a "Free Mumia" T-shirt all the time.

Activism can be a solitary pursuit, but I've found out that to more effective you have to also be an organizer—someone who moves other people to become activists themselves, and who works in unison with other activists strategically. It requires you to be proactive—not just defending yourself and your beliefs. It often requires you to go to meetings, analyze leverage points, develop a strategy, and build coalitions. Building coalitions takes you far outside of punk and requires you to do things directly opposite of what punk ideals would suggest, like working with progressive religious leaders on certain issues. Broader activism shows you the shortfalls of punk ideology.

Now I see that all hardcore isn't inherently political and that a lot of hardcore kids aren't involved in broader struggles. The politics that I used to think of as an essential defining aspect of hardcore, too often looks like nothing more than another spent fad like Power Violence and the Gravity Records sound. Making DIY music is cultural resistance, and it is important, but it's not all that we can, should, and need to do. So being an activist or an organizer entails doing things other punk kids don't necessarily do. In fact, I think one of the greatest mistakes a lot of punk activists make is assuming that punk kids are the only activists or potential activists around.

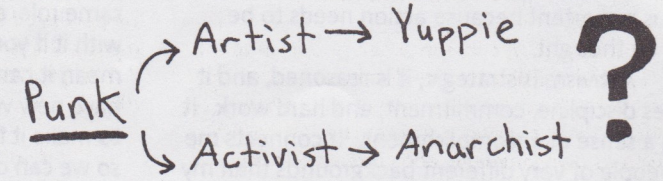



**Figure 2.**

## ::Subculture and Academia::

Being rooted in all these activities gives me unique perspectives. I spent my four years of college getting a degree in American Culture, which is a program that combines some history and literature with a lot of social and cultural theory. The professors taught a lot of things I already knew from participating in DIY hardcore/punk. Its pretty gratifying when a philosophy professor gives a three hour lecture on Nietzsche and you can recite Born Against and Team Dresch lyrics that say the exact same thing, but in only two lines (that rhyme!). Cultural Studies is considered a radical discipline because it critiques the affects of economic and political systems on people's everyday lives. It does this very thoroughly and precisely, which is completely exciting to me, but it's also incredibly frustrating to a punk and activist like me, because so many academics seem uninterested or unable to do anything concrete with their insights.

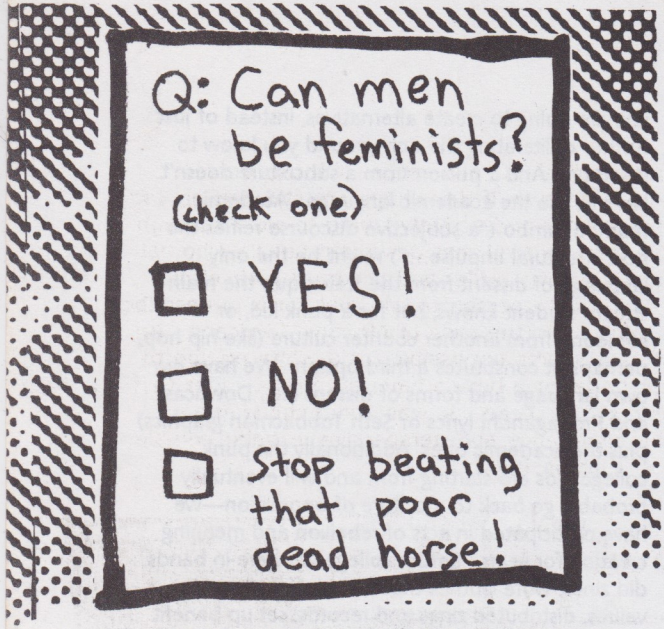
I've been thinking about how studying sociology or cultural studies must be a somewhat different experience for people involved in a sub-culture or counter-culture and those who aren't. Those who enter college as "normal" or mainstream people find in cultural studies a compelling criticism of society. They learn about things like feminism, class divisions, and the media monopoly, but they rarely seem to have the will or creativity to help create alternatives. They say things like "Power works ___ way," or "____ is represented in this image." But sadly, it seems like many of them get trapped in the process of criticism. They can't go back and embrace the dominant culture blindly, like most other people do, but they don't have a counter-culture they can jump into either. So they are left in the culture of academia—the culture of big words, perfect bound journals, and teaching bored students what they learned a few years earlier.

But it's a different story when people entering college have already rejected the dominant culture on their own terms. If you've begun developing a new culture with alternate values and alternate institutions, a culture with its own language, and currents of discussion, like hardcore kids have, before studying "social sciences" you can use the academic classes differently.

When you learn some new idea or realize how two issues are connected, you use that knowledge to fill in holes of your own critique—its reinforces your already strong beliefs and reaffirms the importance of the work you are doing to create alternatives, instead of just further obliterating the only ground you know to stand on. And a person from a subculture doesn't have to use the academic language. Academic mumbo jumbo ("a subjective discourse reifies the post structural impulse...") might be the only language of dissent from the status quo the mainstream student knows, but for a punk kid, or someone from another counter culture (like hip hop, perhaps) it constitutes a third option. We have our own language and forms of dissent (i.e., Downcast and Propagandhi lyrics or Seth Tobbacman graphics) plus the academic ones. Additionally the punk college kids are starting from and will eventually probably go back to a culture of opposition—we have participated in acts of rebellion and meaning creation for years. Before college we were in bands, did zines, wore clothes that articulated alternate values, distributed zines and records, set up benefit shows, and wrote people from across the country. We've been creating our own culture, while simultaneously critiquing dominant culture, for years. Many academic cultural theory buffs have never done any sort of cultural creation by the time they're in their 50's—they've only read and written about how culture is created, and pointed out the shortcomings and successes of other people's attempts.

So, authentic subcultures and counter-cultures have something to offer academics: an identity other than "academic" or mainstream, practical experiments in implementing new values instead of simply wishing for them, a language more accessible to the "masses," networks of like minded people, and some fucking guts to openly dissent and fight the culture one hates. In fact, probably the broadest, most important changes in college teaching styles, curriculums, literary cannons, and academic critiques of society came with the rise of the politicized counter-cultures of the 1960s. So, anyway, shout outs to all the college punks. The *Routledge Crew* will mosh all over the *Verso Crew* in 2001!!! Uh...yeah.

If you too can't take the whole academic pompousness seriously—that is if you want to demystify the elitism of the ivory tower—get in touch because I'm thinking of doing a spoof Cult Studs zine with jokes about Foucault and Stuart Hall, and what not. It will be incredibly stupid. So please participate.




In the past I've tended to shy away from the all to common debate of "Can men be feminists?" The argument seems to quickly fall into a rut hollowed out by the question of whether or not "Good boys" or "Good men" actually do exist. I've heard some compelling arguments for each side by both men and women, and unfortunately quite a few illogical and self-serving arguments as well. Most pitiful is the male eager to rescind any efforts or commitment to be anti-sexist, with the excuse that, "Women say we can't be feminists anyway, so what's the use in trying!" Second to that is the boy more willing to spend hours arguing that he is capable of being a feminist than to spend that time proving it by learning about women's issues and acting on that knowledge.

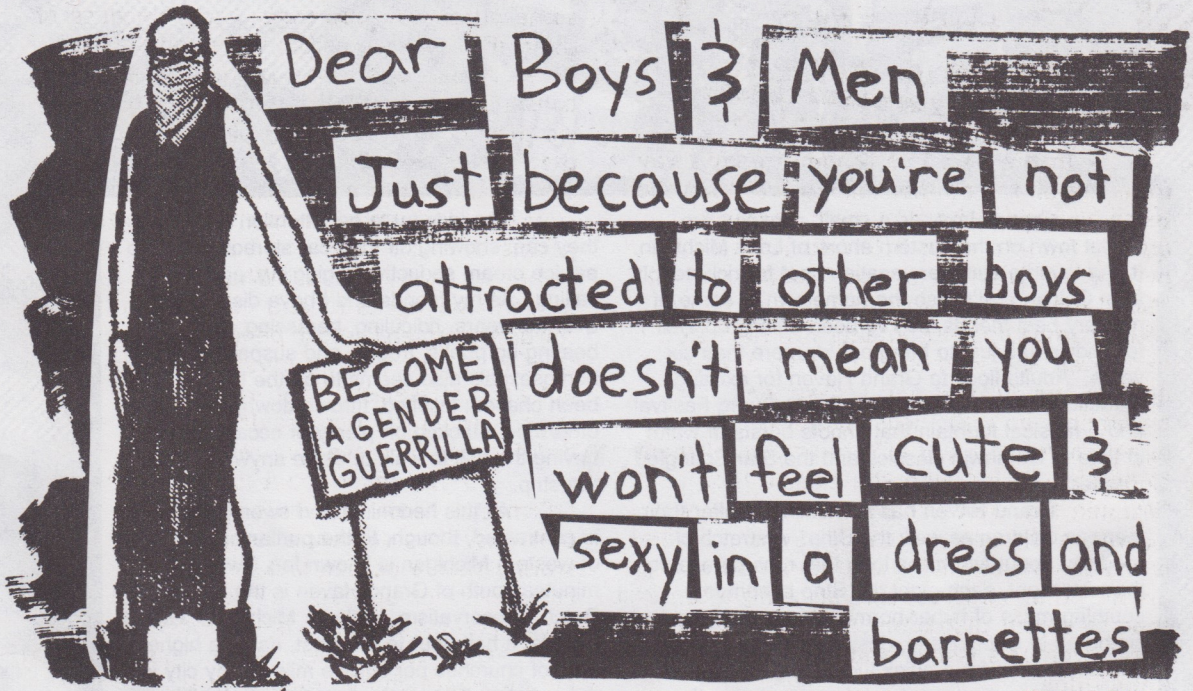
I think that the penny that most frequently derails the train of this discussion is simply the language being used. "Feminist" is a category. The argument on the surface seems to be "Can men fit into the category *feminist*?" That is: can particular men have the essential elements that make someone a feminist. That question, however, implies that everyone involved in the discussion has a shared definition of what it means to be "feminist." I suspect people have so many difficulties with this discussion because the underlying question, "What makes someone a feminist?" is left unanswered. Arguing if someone fits into a category before knowing what comprises that category is obviously backwards and futile. So to move the conversation forward, we need to further interrogate the category *Feminist*.

I think the easiest way to do so is by comparing the language being used to the language used in a different struggle—the fight to end racism. When a white person is prejudiced against people of a different "race", when he disrespects, attacks, or in some other way oppresses them because of their ethnicity, we call that person "racist." When a man oppresses women, when he considers people of the female sex to be worth less, and deserving of less respect than males, we call him "sexist." On the other hand, what do we call a person who works to end unjust treatment towards people of color? We would probably call him or her an "anti-racist." What do we call a person who works to end unjust treatment towards women? Most people's first tendency is to call the person a "feminist," not an "anti-sexist." Anti-racists fight racism, feminists fight sexism. But there is a difference in these two terms.

If you think about it, *feminist* is an affirmative term. It's different from a term that describes someone negatively—a term stating that a person lacks certain convictions or believes in the opposite of those certain convictions—which is what the term "anti-racist" does. An anti-sexist would be someone who is against misogyny, against patriarchy, against sexism. To be a feminist, however, implies going beyond that. Whereas an anarchist is someone who believes in or supports the political theory of anarchy, a feminist supports things associated with being female, someone who believes being a woman is a positive thing.

To really drive this point home, let's return to our comparison with the language of racism. It seems most people of color are

comfortable with progressive white people calling themselves "anti-racist" if those people attempt to understand and combat racism. This is true even if the whites are still dealing with their own personal racism, as long as they are aware of it and actively trying to work through their issues to rid themselves of it. However, if a term existed that described people who not only were for the abolition of racism, but also found dignity, pride, and power in their ethnic culture and heritage—it would be quite strange for a white person to use that term to describe herself. "Afro-centric" is the closest term I can think of, in the case of African-Americans. An afro-centric white person sounds ridiculous, just as it seems impossible for a white person to have Black Pride, a straight person to have queer pride, or a boy to have girl pride. Riot Grrl, for instance, went beyond pointing out the sexism in the scene. It was about the women involved consciously identifying and affirming the experience and perspective of being female, and of creating something explicitly expressive of that position.


Dear Boys & Men
Just because you're not attracted to other boys doesn't mean you won't feel cute & sexy in a dress and barrettes
BECOME A GENDER GUERRILLA

Perhaps, that was what the term feminist was originally intended to mean. If so, I see why the conflation of the terms "feminist" and "anti-sexist" causes so much confusion, debate, and hostility. I think that most people would be much more willing to concede that men can indeed be "anti-sexist" than "feminist." If an essential characteristic of being a "feminist" is taking pride in being a woman, men obviously can never be feminists. It seems to me however, that with considerable concerted effort, men can be feminists *if* the essential characteristic of a feminist is respecting women not only as equal to men, but affirming and celebrating their differences from men as well. By the same token, males could be feminist if that simply means having pride in their own traditionally feminine traits, since we all (hopefully!) know that biological sex and gender traits are two different things.

But really, what's the big deal, guys, if you are or aren't called a feminist? If you are doing what you do, just to be admitted into the club called feminism, then its still all about you, and that's not feminist in any sense of the word.

# What To Do When You Are Bored in a Small Midwestern Town
## Suggestion No. 3479

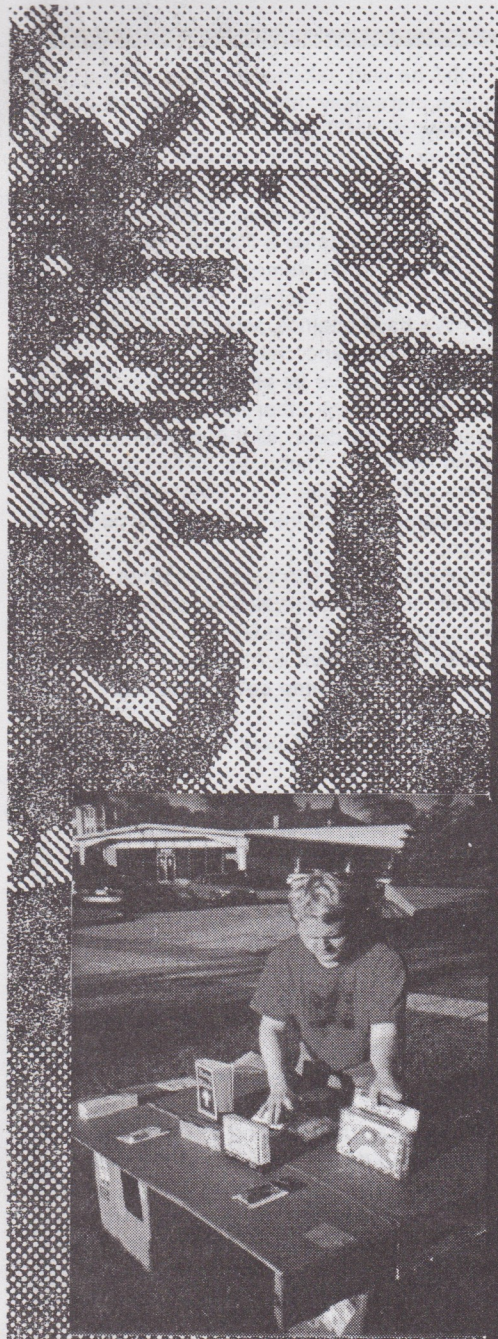
Grand Haven is a small, conservative tourist town on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. It is a favorite summer vacation spot for rich people from Chicago. It's also the hometown of some of my very best friends, so I've been driving up their for shows and just to hang out for more than six years. Adults flock to Grand Haven for exciting attractions such as the yearly Coast Guard Festival and a musical fountain that shoots bursts of water in time to Gershwin classics and the Star Spangled Banner.

Grand Haven has something to offer their teenage children as well: the Strip. A stretch of roadway about two miles long that runs parallel to the waterfront, each night the Strip becomes a seething mass of hyper-hormonal boy and girls slathered in Coppertone, desperately trying to pick one another up for a quick fuck in the time-share before their parents get back from exploring the sand dunes. By 7 PM the streets are congested with convertibles, jeeps, and gleaming pickup trucks, loaded down with teenagers who cruise the few short blocks over and over again, reducing traffic to 10 miles an hour or less. The sidewalks are lined with even more teenagers, the guys shirtless with baseball caps on backwards, the women in bikini tops and shorts or towels wrapped around their waists.

The kids try to get attention however they can: showing off their car stereos, trying to eat ice cream seductively, giggling, and cat-calling. As my friends and I have discovered over the years, ridiculing, harassing, and beating-up punks, freaks, and suspected homosexuals also seems to do the trick. We've been chased, insulted, thrown down hills and otherwise attacked on plenty of occasions for having the gall to walk or skate anywhere near the strip.

All this hedonism and sweaty sexuality is contrasted, though, to the puritanism this area of western Michigan is known for. Twenty minutes south of Grand Haven is the hotbed of Dutch Conservatism, Holland, Michigan. Grand Rapids, a half-hour to the west, has the highest ratio of churches per square mile of any city in the country. The local adults love their bibles and love to be boring.

The Strip is like high school in a bottle. You can go down there whenever you like and remind yourself just how sexist and consumer driven American culture is. Instantly, it becomes perfectly clear once more why you got into punk in the first place, why you had so much pent-up anger for years, and why you devote so much time to changing things.



Feeling bored and mischievious, hanging out one evening last summer, a stroke of genius hit, and Adam, Rye, Kurt, Regina, and I decided to cause a little trouble on the Strip.

When I was 8 years old my parents took my sister and I to a small tourist resort town in northern New Hampshire for a week. My strongest memory of the trip was seeing a skinny guy in tight jeans and a T-shirt with a paper grocery bag pulled over his head. He had cut two small eye holes in the front and poked some twigs through the sides, which kind of resembled antlers. "Mommy, why is that guy wearing that mask?" I asked. She said, "He's probably just sick of tourists." So step one was to create a paper bag with antlers mask. But that is far from creative and challenging; we needed something good, something fun, but also something that made a point. Going down there with pickets signs saying "Your youth culture is heterosexist" didn't seem like it would be super fun or affective, so being ironic seemed about our only option. I have a problem with facetiousness—I'm addicted to it or something. I get this sick thrill out of making fun of people without them knowing it. Its so mean and it gets me into trouble enough that I ought to put that impulse on a leash. But I couldn't help myself on that summer evening, so my friends and I decided to found a new business—Cruising Company, Unlimited.

Cruising is hard work, we reasoned, and there are a lot of things cruisers need if they are going to be successful. We decided to service these needs by providing all the essential items for sale at affordable prices in a convenient location, right on the Strip. Cruisers wouldn't even need to get out of their automobiles, we would have runners to bring the items to them on the fly.

The first stop in our preparations for Cruising Co., Unlimited's grand opening was the local Dollar Store. We emptied our pockets and pooled our few meager dollars to use as investment capital. We bought one each of the following items: **a package of lipstick and fingernail polish, a hand grip exerciser, a tube of breath spray, a plastic toy hair-dryer, a home pregnancy test, a medical quality enema kit, and a paperback edition of the Holy Bible**. This group of objects, we thought, would highlight the moral conflicts being played out between generations each night on the Strip. We also bought some poster paints to make a sign with, and for some reason that I can't recall, a bag of marshmallows. The next stop was the dumpster of the Subway where Regina worked, in order to find some cardboard boxes to construct the storefront and signs out of. With all this loaded into the car, we headed down to the waterfront, parked, and hauled the materials to a grassy strip between the street and sidewalk about half-way through the

cruising circuit. It was visible, comfortable, and we were on public property—a perfect location to open a cruising store!

We built a small table by duct taping the boxes together, then painted "Cruising Co. Unlimited" on the front in bright beach colors. We neatly arranged the items for sale on the cardboard table and started to advertise. I put the antler-bag on my head and mustered up my best carnie/hot-dog stand salesman voice. "Get yer make-up, get your breath spray...We've got all your cruising needs!" I paced back and forth in front of the stand, barely able to see out the eyeholes, loudly proclaiming the virtues of the items we stocked, while Regina, Kurt, and the rest attempted to solicit the attention of others passing by on foot. The reactions were quite mixed. They ranged from, "Fuckin' freaks!" to "What are you doing? I don't get it." to "Well, how much is the nail polish?" It was hard to keep a straight face; we kept busting out in giggles when trying to explain to beefy dudes walking by that they really should buy the hand exerciser to ensure that the ladies would find their grip enticingly manly.

After about fifteen minutes, a cop rolled up and signaled for me to step up to the car. I guess he chose me because I was wearing the bag and was running my mouth the loudest when he arrived.

"What the hell are you kids doing?" he asked.

"Well, sir, we're embracing the entreprenurial spirit of the times, and have started a small business to provide all the young people cruising the strip with essential products such as breath mints and make-up."

"Uh...do you have a permit?"

"Well no sir, I guess we don't."

"You can't sell things with out a permit. You have to charge tax and whatnot, so you're going to have to leave."

At this point, I leaned into the car, and in a voice indicating what I was about to say was just between he and I, I explained, "Actually sir, we aren't really selling any of these items. We've priced them much too high for anyone to seriously consider purchasing them. Really, we're just a group of artists, and this is an example of what we call 'Performance Art'. We're actually making a bit of social commentary through the juxtaposition of the items we're pretending to sell, you see."

"Oh," he said, taken a bit off guard. "Well, I guess that's okay then. Just don't get in anybody's way, alright?"

"No sir, we won't. Thank you."

And he left.

The ease with which we initially dispelled the threat of police made us a little bit more cocky, and we began to add an element of sermonizing furor to the campy sales pitches. "Are you clean and pure? We have enemas and Holy Bibles for sale. Clean your soul and clean your hole!" People continued to drive by and scream at us, call us gay, and so many other ridiculous things that we started writing down all the comments we got. That list would, of course, be perfect for this story, but we lost it months ago. Eventually another cop came up and tried to convince us to close up shop.

"Actually sir," Adam said, "the other officer said we could be here as long as we didn't really sell anything. Its performance art, you see."

"Well, the problem is," the cop responded, "we've had some calls about you displaying an offensive item..."

"...the Holy Bible?" I cut him off, "I guess you're right, it is pretty lewd."

"Not the Bible! The enema!"

We eventually struck a deal; we'd put the enema out of sight, if we could continue to peddle the rest of the wares. This lasted for another ten minutes or so, when a third cop pulled up. He was not nearly as understanding as the previous two.

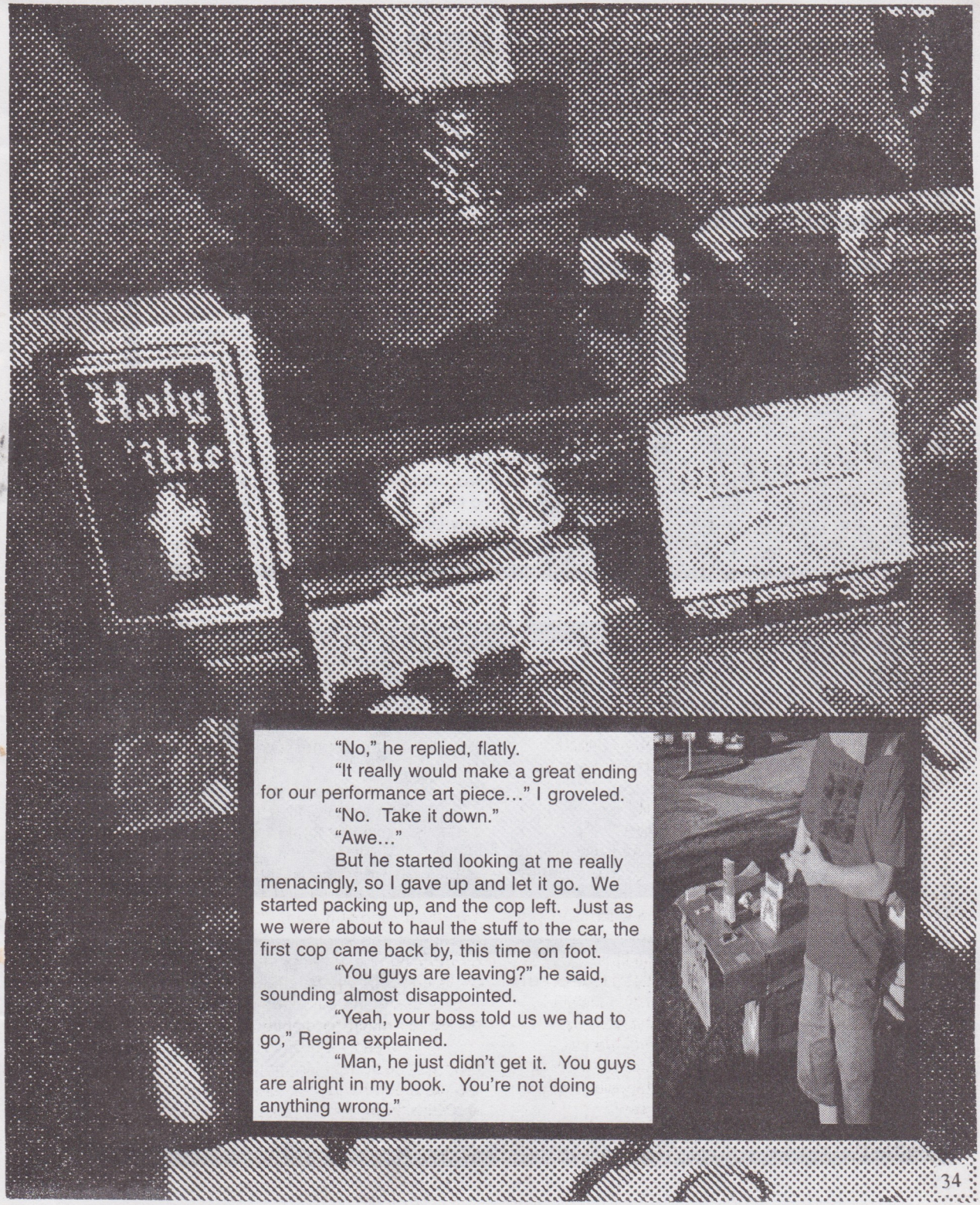
"Take it down," he sternly ordered.

"But sir, two other officers said we were perfectly within our rights."

"I don't care. I'm the commanding officer, and I'm telling you to take it down!"

We were actually starting to get bored of the whole song and dance. The paper bag was getting hot and scratching our necks. All the kids on the strip had already past our little pageant multiple times. We had been talking about calling it quits before the cop even arrived, so we didn't put up too much resistance.

Instead, I quietly asked him, "Do you think you could fake an argument with me, and like put me in handcuffs, and kick the table over, and then throw me in the back of your car or something?"



"No," he replied, flatly.

"It really would make a great ending for our performance art piece..." I groveled.

"No. Take it down."

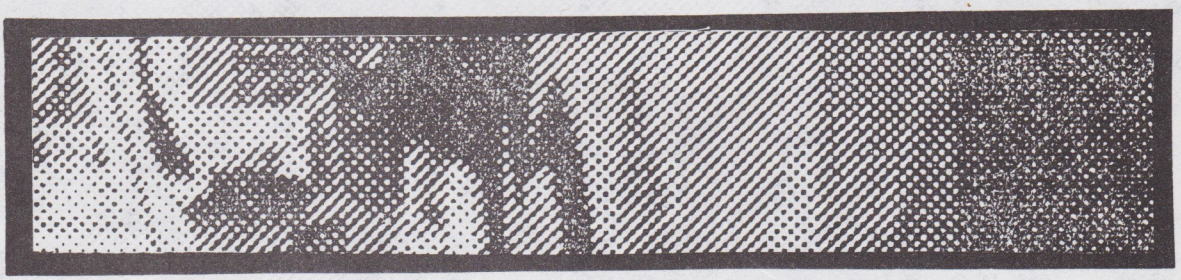
"Awe..."

But he started looking at me really menacingly, so I gave up and let it go. We started packing up, and the cop left. Just as we were about to haul the stuff to the car, the first cop came back by, this time on foot.

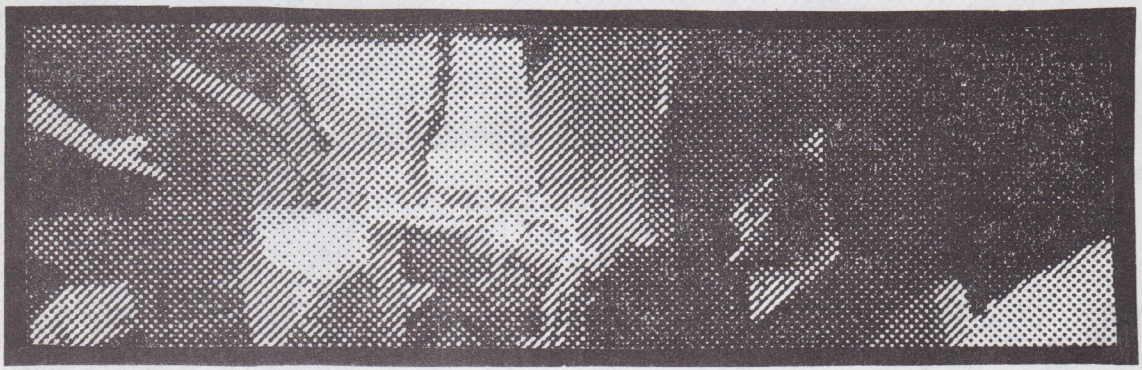
"You guys are leaving?" he said, sounding almost disappointed.

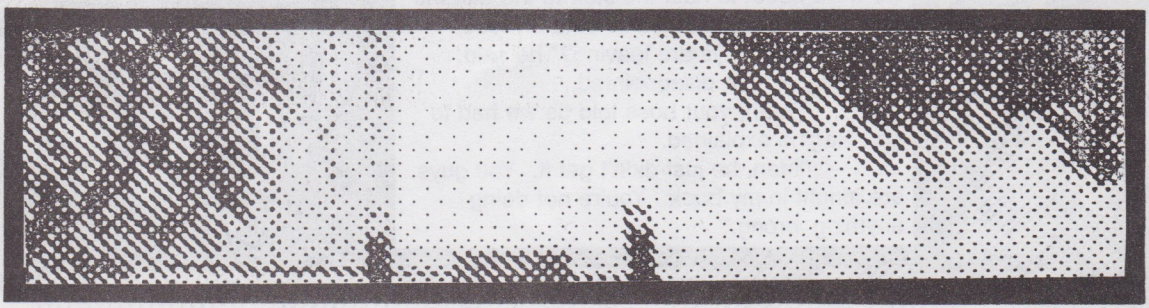
"Yeah, your boss told us we had to go," Regina explained.

"Man, he just didn't get it. You guys are alright in my book. You're not doing anything wrong."



We *hadn't* officially done anything wrong. Its doubtful the cops had any legal grounds to shut us down. One could easily make the argument that our little act touched too many nerves, stirred the shit too much, so the cops stepped in and exerted coercive state power in order to keep social norms and power relationships intact. It could also be argued that the five of us were just being self-righteous assholes, ridiculing other kids for trying to have a good time. Whatever it was, Cruising Company Unlimited was the most fun I'd had and the most creative I'd been in a long time.





I was being lazy, watching TV with my friend Ariana a few days ago. Ricki Lake was administering DNA tests to determine the paternity of some adorable babies on her show. The crowd began questioning one of the possible fathers about his sex life. When they discovered he was active with quite a few women, someone asked, "Do you wear condoms?"

"No," he replied, shaking his head.

Ricki jumped in, "If you're having sex with these women and you don't want to be a father why aren't you using condoms?"

"It doesn't feel right," he explained, as if this was some revelation. "It feels like I'm not really in there, or something."

I turned to Ariana. We both started to say the same thing. "Did he just say that? In the year 2000?" I thought "It doesn't feel right" was last put forth as an excuse in like 1989 or something—whatever year it was that the last dumbass on earth realized AIDS wasn't just a gay disease.

Later that evening Ariana and I met up again and went to a hardcore show. The first band started playing. They were loud as hell and amazing. Ariana pushed her way over to where I was standing and pulled two pieces of spongy orange foam out of her pocket.

"You'd better wear ear plugs or you're going to go deaf!" she yelled.

"No," I told her. "I hate those things. Nothing sounds right when I wear them and I feel like I'm not totally here. Like I'm underwater or something."

# On Rage and Sorrow, Activism and Charity

Rage and Sorrow share a common impetus. Both are emotional reactions people have to events that they wish had not occurred. A person feels a sense of rage when she has power to effect the situation, a sense of sorrow when she does not.

If your grandmother died of health complications related to old age you would most likely feel a sense of loss, an acute loneliness, a sense of longing—sorrow. If she was run over by a drunk driver you would still feel intense sorrow, but it would be compounded with feelings of rage and anger. In both cases your grandma dies—an event you, of course, wish had not occurred. But you react differently to the two situations because of the way she died and the *reason* why she died.

A natural death elicits only a sense of sorrow because it's a situation where nothing could have been done to prevent the death, and it was no one's fault. When someone is murdered though, the friends and relatives are angry. Angry that their loved one could have continued to live but was denied the right and furious that she was put through unnecessary suffering. The surviving relatives have power in this situation. They can seek justice and they can try to change the culture that breeds criminals. They realize they might have had the power to save the victim "if only they had been there." They can't bring the person back, but they know it didn't have to happen. They can avenge her death, they can possibly prevent others from suffering the same way; they can affect the situation in dozens of ways.

This conception of rage and sorrow might shed some light on why women and men act in certain ways and why they are *expected* to act in certain ways. Women have been legally subordinate to men throughout American and European history, which has rendered them powerless, or at least less powerful than men, in countless situations. Women are constantly stereotyped as being too emotional, which is usually code for feeling sad, hurt, or despondent. They are also considered "whiney," which means being upset over something but not doing anything to change it. (Which ignores the fact that if they don't do anything, its often because they don't have the power to, or don't think they have it.) Men, who have more power in society, are thought of as aggressive are stereotyped to react with anger and force—in other words *rage*. As should be obvious, in these common perceptions of gender differences the powerful are paired with rage and the less powerful with sorrow.

Understanding rage and sorrow as diverging reactions to negative events can also help us further our struggle for social justice. Consider television commercials in which Sally Struthers or some other celebrity appeals to the viewers to donate money to help feed starving Third World children. They show children with vacant eyes and bellies swollen from hunger being eaten alive by horseflies. They don't show the adults of the community and they don't explain the reasons why the people of the country are impoverished. The creators of the commercials choose the images they do in order to illicit feelings of sorrow in the viewer. The same basic tact is used by people who run soup kitchens or collect canned goods and mittens for poor families—they appeal to those who have plenty of food and mittens with lines like, "Isn't it a shame…?"

These are examples of charity work—the voluntary efforts of people who don't suffer in a given way to ameliorate the immediate situation of people who do. Charity work usually addresses symptoms of deeper problems but doesn't permanently effect the root causes. Charity is, in fact, the gift that can never be returned. It not only leaves in place old hierarchies and power relationships between those it seeks to help and the oppressive system, it creates a new hierarchy between the charity worker and the receiver. Since the receiver is rarely in a position to return the favor—the gift of food or clothes or a place to sleep—she is permanently indebted to the giver, and expected to lavish them with respect and gratitude.

The other way to deal with poverty, to help people who are hurt or without resources, is activism. Activism is characterized by people, privileged and unprivileged, working together to address and end what they perceive as injustices. Activists also want to end suffering, but they seek to end it permanently for all people by fundamentally changing the power relationships

and the social, political, and economic structures that create and maintain this suffering. The most effective activism is that done by or at least led by members of the community that suffers.

Activists spend time and money, and put themselves in danger of being hurt or imprisoned, because they feel a sense of rage. They understand that people are starving, or are oppressed in other ways, for specific reasons. Once they understand why people are oppressed they can create a plan of action to change the situation. They are angry because they know that things don't have to be the way they are now.

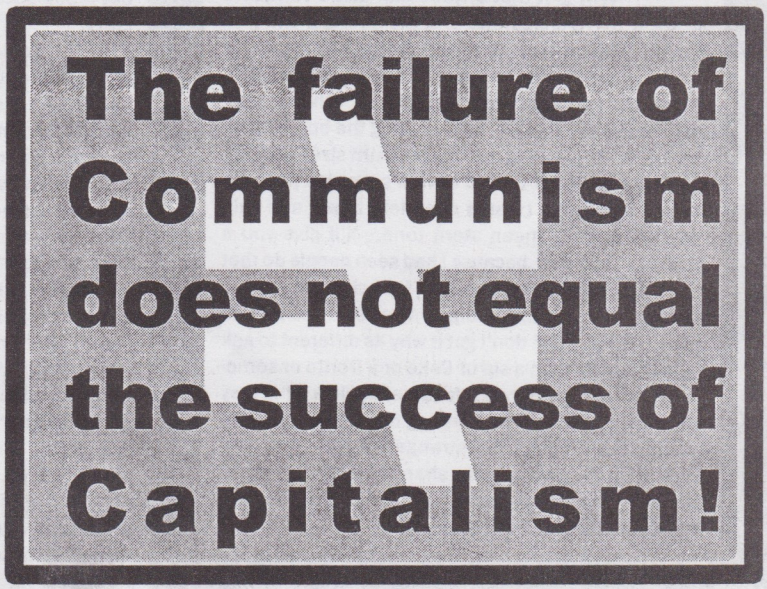
If sorrow is born from a sense of helplessness, and charity arises out of feelings of sorrow, we can surmise that charity is rooted in impotency. When people say that suffering in the world is "sad," "unfortunate," or "really too bad," they imply that they have no real power to change the situation, that the suffering is inevitable, that "it's a shame, but that's the breaks!" Charity workers only address symptoms because they see root causes as inalterable.

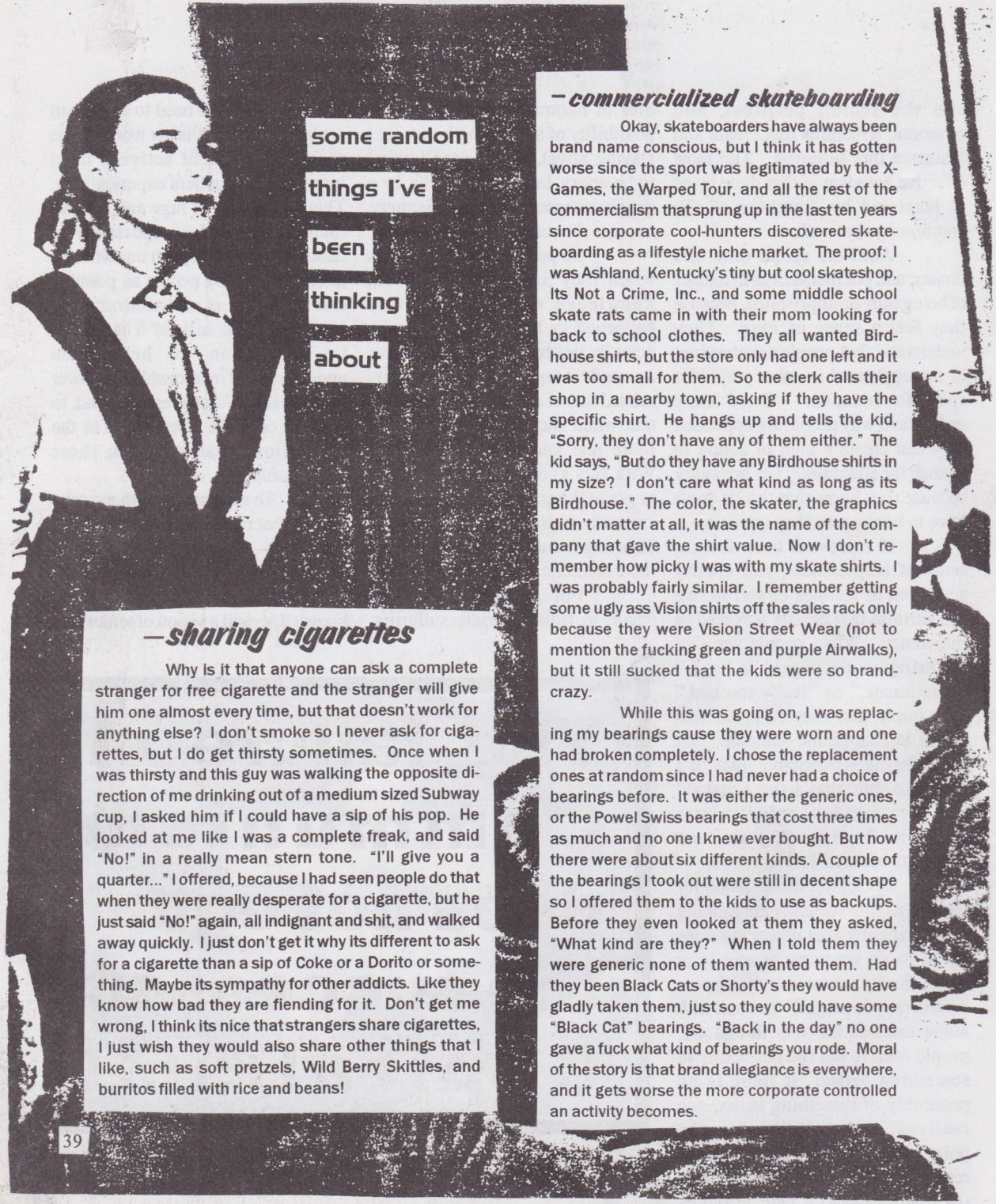
Therefore, the question for those of us who currently are fighting to permanently alter power relations is, "How do we move people from being charity workers to activists—from sorrow to anger?" To react with anger towards the way things are, people need to see the possibility of something better. If there is no possibility of something better, one realizes subconsciously the pointlessness of anger, and one is resigned to sorrow. Going back to the first example, if your grandma dies of natural causes, there's no possibility of something better (her staying alive), so you aren't going to be angry, but if she was hit by a drunk you would, of course be angry, because she surely didn't have to die.

So people become activists when they are empowered with knowledge of what has truly happened in history, where power actually lies today, when they have an understanding of the inter-relatedness of systems of oppression, and when they have a vision of a more just and preferable future. With this knowledge they become angry at the cruel injustices that are currently so prevalent and accepted. This anger and knowledge informs their methods and drives their will.

For serious change to occur, to truly alleviate suffering, millions of people need to engage in activist work, not charity work. To be successful, current activists must increase our numbers exponentially. This conception of rage and sorrow, then, cements the importance of making the first steps in our work be to teach as many people as possible that suffering is not arbitrary and inevitable, that instead it is caused by oppression, to help them understand the relationships of power that create this oppression, and to propose concrete alternatives to the institutions that maintain these relationships.

To summarize with a catchy refrain that can be set to music: Rage succeeds sorrow, when discontentment is empowered, through understanding & knowledge, and a vision of tomorrow.





# some random things I've been thinking about

## —sharing cigarettes

Why is it that anyone can ask a complete stranger for free cigarette and the stranger will give him one almost every time, but that doesn't work for anything else? I don't smoke so I never ask for cigarettes, but I do get thirsty sometimes. Once when I was thirsty and this guy was walking the opposite direction of me drinking out of a medium sized Subway cup, I asked him if I could have a sip of his pop. He looked at me like I was a complete freak, and said "No!" in a really mean stern tone. "I'll give you a quarter..." I offered, because I had seen people do that when they were really desperate for a cigarette, but he just said "No!" again, all indignant and shit, and walked away quickly. I just don't get it why its different to ask for a cigarette than a sip of Coke or a Dorito or something. Maybe its sympathy for other addicts. Like they know how bad they are fiending for it. Don't get me wrong, I think its nice that strangers share cigarettes, I just wish they would also share other things that I like, such as soft pretzels, Wild Berry Skittles, and burritos filled with rice and beans!

## —commercialized skateboarding

Okay, skateboarders have always been brand name conscious, but I think it has gotten worse since the sport was legitimated by the X-Games, the Warped Tour, and all the rest of the commercialism that sprung up in the last ten years since corporate cool-hunters discovered skateboarding as a lifestyle niche market. The proof: I was Ashland, Kentucky's tiny but cool skateshop, Its Not a Crime, Inc., and some middle school skate rats came in with their mom looking for back to school clothes. They all wanted Birdhouse shirts, but the store only had one left and it was too small for them. So the clerk calls their shop in a nearby town, asking if they have the specific shirt. He hangs up and tells the kid, "Sorry, they don't have any of them either." The kid says, "But do they have any Birdhouse shirts in my size? I don't care what kind as long as its Birdhouse." The color, the skater, the graphics didn't matter at all, it was the name of the company that gave the shirt value. Now I don't remember how picky I was with my skate shirts. I was probably fairly similar. I remember getting some ugly ass Vision shirts off the sales rack only because they were Vision Street Wear (not to mention the fucking green and purple Airwalks), but it still sucked that the kids were so brand-crazy.

While this was going on, I was replacing my bearings cause they were worn and one had broken completely. I chose the replacement ones at random since I had never had a choice of bearings before. It was either the generic ones, or the Powel Swiss bearings that cost three times as much and no one I knew ever bought. But now there were about six different kinds. A couple of the bearings I took out were still in decent shape so I offered them to the kids to use as backups. Before they even looked at them they asked, "What kind are they?" When I told them they were generic none of them wanted them. Had they been Black Cats or Shorty's they would have gladly taken them, just so they could have some "Black Cat" bearings. "Back in the day" no one gave a fuck what kind of bearings you rode. Moral of the story is that brand allegiance is everywhere, and it gets worse the more corporate controlled an activity becomes.

## —the meaning of life

I don't know what the meaning of life is. The question doesn't even make sense. Tables don't mean anything, dogs don't mean anything. Words, sounds, and other symbols mean things. But objects have purposes, and people often confuse purpose and meaning. They ask, "What's the meaning of life? What's the point?" which means "What's the purpose?" I don't know what the purpose of *all* life, in general, is. But I avoid that "existential abyss of despair and confusion" by knowing the purpose of my own personal life. I've come to understand that I live with undue privilege and that millions of people are treated cruely and unjustly. It seems to me that we need equal rights and opportunities whether or not we ever figure out a purpose to life over all, and regardless of what that purpose might be. So I've made working for the freedom and equality of all people the purpose of my life. It works for me, or at least it has so far. Maybe it will work for you, maybe something else will.

When people ask about the point of life, it seems like they're seeking a requisite purpose—a duty. So I ask myself whether or not I think fighting for equality and justice is a duty. It's not a duty for me to stop an injustice that I am not at all implicated in, but I do believe it is a duty to reject personal privileges that come at the expense of others. That is everyone's duty. Not a duty to a god or to a country, a duty to each other as people. Destroying privilege and its complement, oppression, is a huge task that will take a very long time. So the next time you are wallowing in self-pity and starting to embrace nihilism, do some activist work. Maybe along the way, we'll figure out something grander, or maybe we will just die, but at least we won't be impotent and at least we will be making life better while it lasts.

## —gendering animals

Isn't it stupid how we gender our pets? Well, I know I do it. Friends of mine have denied it, but I bet I'm not the only one. Like I had a hyperactive audacious male cat for a while, and I thought of him as a scrappy little bully, but if he was female I would think of him as sassy. I do it with other people's pets too—like a dog would be dignified if it was female, but I'd start thinking of it differently—reserved, or something—if I found out it was male. It just shows how ingrained gender roles are that I would project my assumptions not only on other people, but also on animals that aren't even human. As if even if gender wasn't socially constructed, it would be the same across species! I'm a dork. So do you do this too? Have you ever thought about it? My friend Anna, says that she genders animals. She says that it is at least partially positive because it helps people develop a closer relationship with them. But do we have these illusions of closeness with our pets, when really we are totally fooling ourselves as to their personalities, because we are confined by our own expectations of gender? I stay up at night wondering...

## Globalization...

I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brother...

I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903.

Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints.

—Major General Smedley Butler, USMC
NY Times interview, 8/21/31

**nothing new for trash like you!!!**

# Union Summer

## My Month of Organizing California Carpenters

About two years ago I became heavily involved in the anti-sweatshop movement at my school. Our campus activist group, Students Organizing for Labor and Economic Equality (SOLE), worked closely with a number of labor unions, such as the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE!) and the striking Detroit newspaper workers. They gave us advice and supplied us with posters, information, and other materials needed to run a campaign against sweatshop labor conditions in the factories that made T-shirts, hats, and other apparel bearing the University of Michigan name and logo. We organized students to support their pickets, give educational presentations, and push the movement for workers rights in unique ways that our position as college students afforded us.

At one SOLE meeting, a recruiter from the AFL-CIO (an umbrella federation of nearly all the unions in the United States) handed out information and applications for a program called Union Summer. She explained that Union Summer was a month long internship where students and other interested young people could gain first hand experience organizing workers in any of a number of industries, at sites across the country. A few members of SOLE had taken part in the program the previous summer and highly recommended it, so I decided to apply.

It took a while to hear back from the AFL-CIO, (I found out later that they were swamped with hundreds more applications than they had initially expected), but one day in May I got a call saying that I was accepted. I was given the choice of working in Philadelphia, Seattle, or San Francisco. All three cities sounded amazing, but I chose to work with the Carpenters Union in San Francisco. I hung up the phone giddy and excited, but a little nervous also. I knew that capitalism was fundamentally flawed, and that the labor movement was crucial in the struggle for a just and meaningful world. I'd studied quite a bit of labor history. But I'd grown up in a "professional" family—both my parent's worked in offices, not in factories or in the building trades. I'd never met a carpenter in my life; the closest I'd come was building skateboard ramps in my driveway out of scraps of wood paneling. And my wheels would usually crack through those ramps and get stuck, sending me flying, chin first, onto the driveway. I wasn't about to let these apprehensions stop me from having a big adventure and doing important work though, and I'm glad I didn't. How else do you learn about people with lifestyles you're not familiar with, but to go out, meet them, and try shit?

What follows is my journal entries from my month in the Central California Valley (it turned out the site was *around* San Francisco, not actually in the city all that much). I'm a pretty pathetic journal writer (I only even attempt to do it when I'm on trips or I know something cool is going to happen), so I've added to the entries a bit in order to give the best account possible. I'm sharing all this with you because I think its great to have a public record of movements like this (you can see my time as a librarian coming through here), because it gives an account of the state of the labor movement today, and what its like to be a carpenter in northern California—things that most people reading this zine probably know shit-all about. Linking radical activism and counter-culture with the labor movement is something people have talked about for years, but not something many punks and activists seem to put a lot of real energy into. Hopefully this will open up peoples eyes and provide an assessment of the possibilities.

**Its Monday June 21st,** I don't know what time exactly cause I'm flying across time zones, but its some time in

the morning. I was going to write down some expectations of what Union Summer will be like, but something else keeps popping into my head. I realize I have two models in my head of what "working class people" are like—each one just as incomplete and stereotyped as the other. The first is this idea of working class heroes—the proud, self-educated, hard-working poor who organize unions, overcome racism, and build radical political parties to overthrow capitalism through the power of their class solidarity. Of course, this is just an idealized view that comes from reading so much labor and radical history about the twenties and thirties.

The other conception I have comes somewhat from popular culture, but also a lot from punk: working class people as rednecks, white trash, mullet styling, pink mesh back "Insane Hussein: You Can't Touch This!" hat wearing, truck driving '*mer*icans, who buy their clothes *and* groceries at Walmart.

I know neither one of these is right. The fact that all I know is caricatures of people, that I don't know any carpenters or factory workers on a personal level is so fucked. And I'm far from the only person that doesn't really know anyone outside of my class background. No wonder we feel no empathy or interest in how our actions affect others.

**It is still Monday, now 12:19 West coast time.** It turns out our base of operations is in Manteca, a small bedroom community about two hours east of San Francisco, in California's Central Valley. Manteca looks suburban, but California suburban. The architecture is different, there is lots of stucco, and buildings are brighter colors.

An organizer named John picked me up at the airport and drove me out here. We went through a beautiful pass with dozens of twirling white high-tech looking windmills lining these bumpy green hills. John explained that they were part of a Green Energy initiative from a while back. It makes for a kind of surreal scene—you feel like somehow you took a wrong turn and ended up in Teletubby land. John was interesting to talk to. He agreed with my views on prisons, suburban sprawl, and other issues. But I definitely realize I need to get used to talking to progressives instead of radicals.

So far I've met three other interns and the coordinator. Fernando, who is our facilitator/coordinator/leader type person is a young guy from San Diego who dropped out of college to organize with the United Farmworkers—the union Caeser Chavez founded. He seems super nice and full of positive energy. The other interns seem pretty cool too. Their names are Cameron, Henry, and Celeste. All are in college or just graduated this spring. I spoke briefly with Cameron and Celeste about activism at their schools, which they are both highly involved in.

We are hooked up! We're staying at a nice Best Western with a pool and a sauna. There is a diner next door where we have a tab. We can eat whatever we want, whenever, for free! This is great because I won't have to spend my stipend on food, like I thought I would. I can save most of it because there won't be any other time to spend it until Union Summer is done.

At 2:30 we met at the council office in Manteca—basically a little stucco coated trailer used exclusively for the organizing campaign. We went over some basics rules for Union Summer, a bit about the campaign, and we did some icebreakers. The other kids are named Mariko, Nate, Anna, Wendy, and Joell. We were done by 6:00 or so and ate dinner at Jimmy's. Afterwards I sat by the pool discussing socialism with Cameron. I think we will get along well. Actually everyone is quite nice—we have a good group and most of us know a bit of history and radical theory, so I'm sure we'll learn from each other.

**Its 9:49pm Monday June 22nd.** Today we woke up at 7:30, ate at Jimmy's and headed to the Hall. We discussed carpenter organizing and did a "Practical Economics" course, went over the schedule, watched a film about women in the Flint Sit-down Strikes, and discussed hindrances and the benefits of organizing now and then. Tomorrow we are going to participate in a Justice for Janitors rally in Silicon Valley. Its not really related to the Carpenters campaign, but its good to offer support, and it will be fun. We made picket signs, noisemakers, and a banner. I'm afraid the banner will tear because its only made out of paper, but its pretty cool. Its just big and says SOLIDARITY. I suggested something like, "Just because we clean the toilets, doesn't mean you can treat us like shit!" but that's pretty long, and we didn't know how militant they were going to be.

Jimmy's for dinner and lunch. The food is good, but I don't know if I'll be able to handle eating there three meals a day for a month! I've already tried just about all the vegetarian options.

**11:20 pm Wednesday June 23rd**--I'm extremely tired

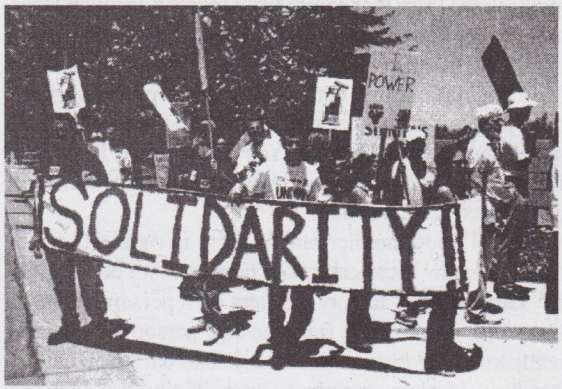
and need to sleep because I have to wake up at 4:15 tomorrow morning. Today I woke at 5:00 AM, showered, and grabbed a quick breakfast at Jimmy's. By 6:00 I was in a car with four others on the road for a 2 hour drive to San Jose. We got to a "Labor Complex" at about 8:00. It housed locals, councils, and the area's organizing office. The organizers gave us juice and donuts and for two hours we started learning carpenter terms and how the business operates, as well as how the organizing campaign is being run.

Basically, none of the residential construction market is organized, but that is the part of the industry that is booming. The Carpenters Union had a good percent of it organized twenty years ago, but they weren't aggressive, and they focused on the commercial side (building restaurants, office buildings, etc.) But the residential side is made up of tons of tiny little contracting and sub-contracting firms. If you just organize one, and demand they pay union wages, the unorganized competition will be able to bid much lower for jobs, and the organized one will go out of business, because it can't get any work. So the trick is you have to organize numerous little companies at once, so the competition isn't so harsh. The other factor that makes it so difficult is that about two-thirds of the residential carpenters are recent immigrants, both legal and illegal, from Mexico. Most of them speak very little English. And in some cases they have a "Coyote"—a guy that came to the U.S. a few years back, learned English, and then went back and brought members of his family or his neighbors to the U.S., got them a job and a place to live, and now controls everything they do and takes part of their paychecks. He's like a low intensity slave master to his own people.

The whole union's organizing campaign is fairly new, so our job will be to go out to the construction sites and tell the workers a bit about the union, find out what the conditions are in their companies (how much they make, if they get benefits, if they are provided with drinking water), and have them fill in their names, addresses, and phone numbers on little cards so we can get in touch with them later. Hopefully, we'll also do some of the next stage, which is having longer conversations with the workers at their homes. We did some role plays to practice doing these job site visits and home visits.

After the training, we drove to the part of town where all the hi-tech corporations have their "corporate campuses." We were honking and holding picket signs out the window while en route to the demo. Cameron was driving the car I was in and a fucking cop pulled us over for supposedly running a red light, but the other cars in our caravan all saw that it was green. It was straight out harassment. The unions lawyers are going to contest the ticket.

We marched and chanted for over an hour—mostly in Spanish, because most of the janitors are also immigrants that only know a limited amount of English.




It was an intense scene—two worlds colliding. The male high tech execs that work in the day, the low paid female janitors that clean the offices by night. People buzzing by, staring at us from their BMWs, while we walked down streets that didn't even have sidewalks. The janitors were pretty excited, and had even planned to take over a busy intersection and sit down for a while, but the police presence was too severe, so instead they slowly crossed the streets repeatedly, backing up traffic for a while.

After the rally we returned to the labor complex for some pizza, more house call training, and some more role playing. In the late afternoon we each went with an organizer to observe actual house visits. I went with a woman named Judy. The first guy we visited was satisfied with his job and didn't have any issues with the company so we couldn't do much. We had the wrong address for the second guy. All the interns met back at 9:00 pm, debriefed quickly, then headed back to Manteca. We arrived here a bit after 11:00. 6:00am to 11pm. That's a 17 hour work day! That totally sucks, but its pretty typical for organizers according to Fernando.

**6:30 PM Thursday June 24**--Today is the first day that we interns split up into 3 teams to cover different cities.

I actually got up at 4:15 this morning. Fernando had Cinnamon Rolls and OJ for us before we hit the road around 5:00. I'll be working with Mariko and Anna this week. When we got to Oakland at about 7:15 we learned we had to go to Martinez—a town in the hills an hour away. Finally arrived around 8:30. We met the local organizers, and I was assigned to visit some construction sites with a man named Martin.

Martin is an enormous black man who is half deaf, so he speaks really loud. He has a deep booming voice and he swears a lot. He reminds me of Samuel L. Jackson, but bigger. He used to be a hardwood floor specialist. He made floors for gymnasiums, museums, colleges, and other fancy buildings. He loved doing it and made $37.85 an hour. But he hurt his hand and knees badly (you could see the scars from surgery and pins poking out from his knees) and was forced to stop. He had huge pride for his work and enjoyed doing it. So the next best thing, he reasoned, was helping other carpenters get the proper training, money, and benefits for their carpentry.

We had a really successful day, in terms of organizing. First we went to a site and spoke to a worker, a superintendent, and a painting contractor. I was confused as to why we would talk to a superintendent, since he's the boss of the work site. But Martin went over the whole structure of the construction business, how there is this huge hierarchy of developers, and contractors, and sub-contractors, and on down the line. The superintendents are often just workers with more experience, but they have some more sway with the people above them. Martin tried to convince the guy that union workers do a better job and don't fuck up as much because they have training, so it will save the company money in the long run. We were standing in a trailer, and Martin widens his stance, puts a hand on one wall, and starts to shift his weight back and forth--the whole fucking trailer starts shaking and rocking. He asks the contractor, "When this happens,"—meaning an earthquake—"and you know it will, how many of those houses are going to last?" Yikes!

After lunch we went to a job site where Martin had been talking to workers for months. They were pissed about low wages and lack of benefits. Martin came on really powerfully and he totally whipped up the workers excitement. "I need leaders! I'm not going to waste my time on people not willing to fight to change their own lives!" The workers agreed to form a committee and meet with union leaders after work next week.

I saw a young guy—probably like 17 or so—standing off to the side. I tried speaking to him in English, but I could quickly tell he didn't understand me. I tried the little Spanish I know ("Me llamo Andy, soy con la union. Como te llamas?") He got a big smile on his face and thanked me for trying to speak Spanish. I asked him a couple things, but then he got going too fast for me to follow. I got Anna, who had arrived a few minutes earlier, to come over and help, since she is fluent. I think the kid thought she was cute, because he asked her on a date or something. By this time the older guys had made a list with their phone numbers and the guy Anna and I were talking to agreed to sign it too. The whole scene was really rad, cause the workers were pissed off and willing to do something about it—we were just facilitating the process.

Later in the afternoon Martin and I started heading to another job site, but we noticed in the notebook the organizers keep that the last time an organizer visited this site, the company wasn't providing the workers with drinking water (which is required by law) and that was a major issue for them. So we stopped at a grocery store and bought a bunch of bottled water to bring to the guys, as a way of breaking the ice. When we were about to leave the grocery store I was getting a little sleepy, so I was kind of dazing off. Martin goes, "You think she's hot?" "Huh?" I said, a little confused. "That girl you were staring at, you want her, huh?" I looked back and there was a women in the general direction I had been blanking out in. I said, "Uh, no, I wasn't looking at her." "C'mon, you can admit it," he assured me. Yuck.

The guys were all incredibly thankful for the water. I busted out my pathetic Spanish skills, but they were enough to get almost everyone there to fill out the union card with their names, phone numbers and addresses, so we could talk to them one-on-one later. I felt helpful, which was cool.

As Martin and I were driving back to the office, he said some other things that kind creeped me out a bit. Some how prisons came up, and he said that he'd be in jail for six months once. "It was total bullshit. I was in this 7-11 with my little girl. She was only 12. These two guys who were in there started arguing, cursing each other, and pushing each other. So I told them, 'Hey, watch it! That's my daughter right there.' One of the guys starts coming up to me, telling me to 'Shut the fuck up!' so I gave him a shove, and he fell back and crashed

through the plate glass window. They charged me with assault with a deadly weapon, but I was just trying to watch out for my girl!" He went on to tell me how he tried to help the other guys in prison, while also making money off them with some racket he set up. "They just don't know how to act, see. See, I know how it goes. You don't lip off to the cops or the guards. You say, 'Yes, sir. Yes, sir. What ever you want, sir.' but then when they turn their back, I say"—by this time he had worked himself up into a rage, was banging on the steering wheel, and shouting at the top of his lungs—"'You can SUCK...MY...BIG...BLACK...MOTHER FUCKING....DICK!!!"

I just rode in silence, and was glad when he dropped me off at the hotel. Despite Martin being a little intense and macho for me, I'd had a really good, productive day.

Mariko, unfortunately, had a different experience entirely. She had ridden with two guys—Tim and Marty. They said all this creepy stuff to her, like, "So... the big question: Do you have a boyfriend?" As if they should hit on her if she said no. And then they said something like, "So..no one knows where you are except us..." and all this other shit that amounted to sexual harassment. Mariko told Martin what happened when we all met up at the hotel. She told me she felt comfortable talking to him because he was a person of color, and she felt like he would be supportive because she was also a person of color. Anna chipped in that she thought he was a good guy too, but I told them that I felt unsure about him because of some of the things he had said to me. I fell asleep about 11:00. At 12:00 I woke up very confused to knocking at my door. When I opened it, Fernando was standing there. "Hey, bro," he said, "I heard what happened with Mariko. We need to deal with this first thing tomorrow. I need to sleep on your floor, okay?" I was totally impressed that the minute he heard, he changed plans, hopped in the car, and drove 2 hours to deal with these fucks. After I laid back down I wasn't sure if he really was there, or if I just imagined it.

Its now Monday, June 28th, three days later. I'm such a shitty journal writer. I've been so tired that its hard even to record what has happened, much less any thoughts or analysis.

**On Friday, the 25th** I woke up around 6:00am. Fernando got up and immediately began making phone calls about the sexual harrasment. We got to the office about 7:00. John Walsch, who is one of the head honcho's of the entire Northern Californian organinzing campaign was there and he and Fernando started meeting right away. Meanwhile the rest of us had a debriefing meeting about what we did the day before. People kept getting pulled out of our meeting—first Marty, then Tim, than Mariko.

I left to do some site visits with Johnella, a female organizer, before the situation was worked out. Johnella was furious and upset about what had happened to Mariko, and she spoke about how much harassment she faced as a carpenter and as an organizer. I realized how tough women had to be to stand up to and beat back the sexual advances and attacks on their self-esteem to work in the industry, or even in the union, which should be a model of equality and respect for the rest of the workers. I really enjoyed talking to her, but soon we got a call on the Nextel for me to switch partners. I would work with Tim today, so Mariko could go with Johnella. I was happy for Mariko to be able to work with a rad, supportive women, but I loathed having to go with Tim.

Spending the afternoon with him didn't improve my impression of him at all. When we got to the first job site, there were about 20 Latinos and 2 or 3 white guys. Tim made a beeline for the white guys and started chatting it up with them, and virtually ignored the others. We have these orange carpenters pencils with a 1-800 number for the union on them. Tim would just walk up to the Latino guys, and say, "Do you speak English?" When they shook their heads, "No," he would started talking louder, almost shouting—"UNION! CALL US!" then he'd make a telephone motion, shove pencils into their pockets, and pat them on the back. What a bunch of patronizing fucking racist bullshit. I'd run up to them and try my hardest to say what I could in Spanish, explain who we were, and just generally try to be polite, but I felt it did little good, since Tim didn't even want to collect the contact cards. He just wanted to "scout the sites." I wondered what the point was in coming out to the sites at all, if we weren't even getting contact info to get a hold of these guys later.

After less than an hour of "work" Tim declared it was time for lunch, so we sat around and ate for more than an hour. Then we went to a site where the union has a "salter"—a union carpenter who is working undercover to find out information about a company we are trying to organize. I thought the guy was pretty cool, until we were about to pull away in the car and the guy

leans in past me and says to Tim, "Oh, did I tell you I figured out a way to bring my Nextel to the site? Yeah, I just put it in an empty Coleman water jug, and they'll never know its there." Tim asks, "What if Johnson [the supervisor] asks for a drink?" "I'd tell him to get his big nigger lips off my jug!" I was just totally stunned. I felt a stinging hot sensation all over my body. Tim glanced over at me and told the guy, "Hey, not in front of the kid!" to which I add, "Not at all!" One fucked up thing after another, and it was still the first week of the internship.

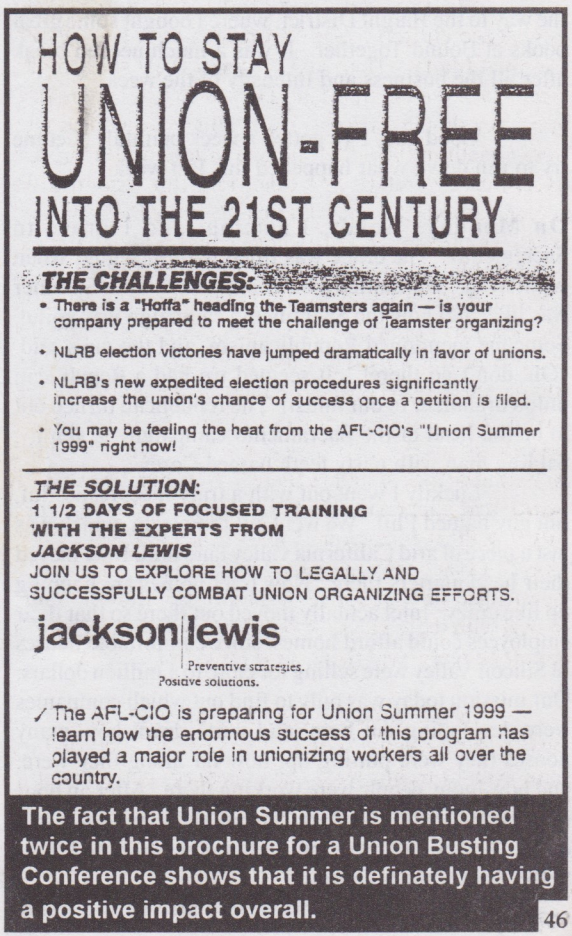
On the way back to the office, Tim piled yet another piece of shit onto the pile. It turns out that the union uses some form of representational democracy to vote on contracts and certain issues. So each local elects people to be their representatives and cast votes, supposedly in accordance with the local's member's wishes. But the people who are paid organizing staff are pulled out of the locals as well, and since there are a limited number of people who are active participants and leaders in the union, the electors and organizers often overlap. In fact, Tim informed me, probably half the organizers on staff were also elected representatives for their locals. The problem was that as organizers they were paid by the union regional council, and that regional council put a lot of pressure on them to vote the way the union higher-ups wanted things. But that was often NOT what the local rank and file members wanted. Tim was honestly scared that he and the other organizers would loose their jobs if they voted the "wrong" way on the upcoming contract ratification vote. He told me that the organizers salary was amazing—quite a bit more than he was making as a carpenter—and that he hadn't sold out yet, but that he truly might be tempted to in the future. Needless to say, by the end of the day, I wasn't thinking very highly of him or the union.

When we got back to the office in Martinez, Anna, Mariko, Fernando, and I piled in a car and drove back to Manteca to meet up with the other two teams for the weekend. When we got back, Anna informed me that my suspicions about Martin were correct. After pretending to be all supportive of Mariko and informing his boss about how the other guys harassed her, he turned around and did the same thing to Anna! When the two of them went out organizing that day, he asked her what kind of sexual fantasies she had Then he told her that he and his wife had an open relationship, and asked if she had ever been with a man of another race before.

Bullshit. Two women sexually harassed in two days. I don't want to believe what people say about unions—that they are sexist, homophobic, old boys clubs—is true, but the Carpenters Union sure isn't proving other wise. I know I shouldn't assume all unions are the same, its just so fucking frustrating.

After all this, it sure was nice to see the other kids, and talk it all over. They're all totally progressive and as angry and upset as I am. It makes me feel good, like it's a generational thing—out with the old, in with the new. But I know that even that's not true. This is just a rare grouping of smart, politically conscience kids.

**Saturday**: didn't do much. Talked about our experiences from the last couple of days, reviewed how to do house visits, then we had a cookout. Fernando showed us a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**The fact that Union Summer is mentioned twice in this brochure for a Union Busting Conference shows that it is definately having a positive impact overall.**

recipe his family loves: grill cobs of corn on a grill, then rub lemon on them. Its super good.

**Sunday:** We had our first day off. I was hoping we would have both weekend days off every week, but we actually only get like three or four days total. Work-a-holism sucks, even if you are doing good work. Nate, Joell and I went into San Francisco for the day, and had a great time. We caught the Queer Pride parade, which was huge and amazing of course because it was in San Francisco. I just couldn't believe that it took like 10 minutes for all the Dykes On Bikes to go past. It was a little weird to be there, cause I'd been with all these macho men all week, and I had been acting pretty manly the whole time. But I was like, woo-hoo, I miss being a little pansy boy. After that we went to the X Games and watched some skateboarding, then walked our asses all the way to the Haight District, where I bought some great books at Bound Together. It was a much needed break after all the business and intensity of the week.

Good god, I've gotten a week behind! Let me try to run down what happened this last week.

**On Monday**, Wendy, Cameron, and I drove to Sacremento. The office was filled with four guys when we arrived. We chatted a bit about what Union Summer was like, and how the Sacramento campaign was going. Someone mentioned Republicanism, and the guys said, "Oh, don't go there!" It seemed we had a Republican union organizer in our midst! The republican turned out to be the head of the Sacramento campaign—a skinny, balding man with nasty teeth named Corey.

Luckily I went out with a truly nice, respectful, fun guy named Phil. We went out to Folsom, which was just a piece of arid California valley land until Intel moved their headquarters there. Now tract homes are popping up like crazy. Intel actually moved out there so that their employees could afford homes, since comfortable houses in Silicon Valley were selling for close to a million dollars. Our mission today was only to find out which companies were developing out here, and write down how many houses they were putting up, how far along they were, and how many people were working there. After an hour of driving around counting cement slabs, we got a call on the Nextel, that we should head downtown and meet at the State Capitol Building.

When the other organizers arrived, we found out that we were just supposed to sit in the audience to create a "Labor Presence" since the state legislature was voting on some labor related bills. It seemed like a bit of a waste of time, but it was kind of interesting to see the government in action, and I did get to see SDS leader Tom Hayden, who is now a liberal California state senator. I was going to go try to talk to him, but he slipped out and disappeared.

In the hallway of the capital building I met one of the fabled "Union Old Timers" that you always hear about—the stereotypical union boss that looks more like a Mafia thug. Wendy had sat in on a meeting with this guy earlier that morning, but she had forgotten his name.

When she politely asked him what it was he got noticeably upset. He asked incredulously, "You don't remember my name?" I didn't like his tone, so I asked him, "Do you remember hers?" That seemed to really piss him off. "Of course I do!!!" he scowled. But he never said it. Instead he started hammering me with questions like, "What does your father do?" When I told him my dad was a scientist, he kept asking dumber and dumber questions, culminating in, "Have you ever had a weekend?" "Its unions that gave you the weekend, you know!" As if I didn't know that, and as if that was the only reason I would support the labor movement. How on earth, did me asking him if he remembered my friend's name, lead him to believe I was some anti-union rich kid, or whatever perception he had that would lead him into such a tirade. They wonder why unions are becoming more and more isolated? Hmm. I wonder.

Afterwards, Corey took the three of us interns to dinner at Tower Café—which is right next door to the original Tower Records. Its weird to realize that chain stores grow out of local businesses. Like sitting in the

original Starbucks would be really strange, too. Corey explained that he used to manage a contracting firm before becoming an organizer. You could tell he still liked to be a boss. He tried to impress us with some lame bullshit about how he could make anyone cry in less than two minutes. I was growing to dislike him more and more.

**Tuesday**: We got chewed out for being five minutes late, even though the everyone was just sitting around shooting the shit when we got there. I went out with Phil again, with Wendy riding with us as well. We talked to quite a few workers today, all in Spanish, and got some contact information from some of them. Only one or two of the Sacramento guys speak Spanish, so it's a good thing we're here. We don't speak it very well, but at least we try.

Afterwards we went to the capital again, this time for a rally in support of the Governor. I don't know much about California politics, but I know this new guy, Grey Davis, is at least marginally better than that fuck Pete Wilson. Basically it was a big media event love in, where the unions came to show support for the new budget he was unveiling. In other words, political ass kissing. We were supposed to just stand around in our union shirts and clap. As he mentioned each new part of his budget, the crowd gave hearty applause. I stood there and golf-clapped a little, not too amused about my role as a democratic ass kissing puppet. But when he announced that he had allocated 4.5 million dollars to further prison expansion, I let out a a small, solitary, "Boo!" Half-hearted as it was, it earned quite a response. My fellow Union Summer interns thought it was really brave and cool. The rest of the union guys around me turned and scowled. "Building prisons has always put food on my table!" one guy said. Yeah, as if building schools and community centers wouldn't also put the food there. It just showed how these Carpenters politics were based solely on their own self interest.

**Wednesday:** Did site visits all day. Got to have some decent discussions with the guys working. Many of them know nothing about the union. They've heard it's a good thing, but don't know how it works, or how to get involved. They're working for $7 an hour, when union carpenters doing that work would be making two to three times that. Three quarters of the guys are recent immigrants that don't know English, don't know their rights, and are taking anything they can get. Its almost the new millenium and these people face the same issues that immigrant workers faced 100 years ago. Its fucking bullshit, and I wonder when it will ever change. I do get a lot different sense from talking to the workers who have lived all their lives in the U.S. and those who have just moved here. The white guys, for the most part, think the union is no good, and they have little hope in improving their situation. Many of them are stand offish and cocky. But most of the guys I speak to in Spanish seem genuinely interested, and are much friendlier, even with the language barrier.

**Thursday:** Didn't do a whole lot because Phil was sick today. Wendy and I helped the organizers make fliers on their computer. Its amazing that they don't even know how to make a simple flier, or use Word or anything. I'm not saying, "How could they be so dumb?" its just interesting that we come from such different times and worlds. I can't imagine not knowing how to type, and they've never until now had a need to. I'm just surprised that they don't get computer training when they take the classes to become organizers.

Corey found out that I booed the governor for the prison spending, so he chewed me out, then went off about how prisons are good and free trade and NAFTA are good, and that we should put prisons on the Mexican border so that exiting prisoners have to stay in Mexico.

At about 4:00, Cameron, Wendy, and I drove back to Manteca. It was nice to hang with the other interns for the evening.

**Friday:** Today we all drove to Oakland, where we visited a United Farm Workers office, and heard about what the organizers there have to deal with—threats of violence, fake company unions, firings of union leaders. We were then supposed to meet up with another Union Summer group that had been helping to organize some hotels in San Francisco. At the last minute though, we were shuffled off to another union office, where we stuffed envelopes and did some phone banking for another campaign. It was a little random, but it gave us experience with another aspect of organizing.

Afterwards, we met the other Union Summer group for lunch. One of the interns was a punk and suddenly I realized I missed being around punks, even though I liked most of the kids in my group. We tried to go on a radical walking tour of the city, but someone got lost, so the only things we saw were an old IWW building

and a Post Office with radical murals that were painted in the 1930s.

That night a couple of the kids from my group met up with part of the San Francisco group, and we went to some dance clubs in the Castro district. I was having fun dancing, until some big buff Ken doll guy came up and drunkenly plopped his hand on my head, and started rubbing my hair around, saying, "I love your hair!" I said thanks, and felt flattered, but then he danced back over to me and did it again, this time, sloppily dragging his hand down my face, just kind of rubbing it over my whole head all gross like. The guy he was with seemed a little put out, so I pointed out that that guy had nice hair as well, and moved to another part of the bar.

**Saturday, the Fourth of July**: I met up with my friend Erin, who lives in Oakland. We took a bus up into Marin County, to go to a tofu and hummus factory. It was the best hummus I've ever had. After eating we decided to hitchhike back and had the easiest time ever. We actually picked the cars we wanted to ride in. I said, "Oh look at the cool old pickup truck," and the guy pulled over and said "Hop in!" When we made it back to San Francisco, we went to Erin's friends' apartment, because the woman was supposedly having a 4th of July party. Unfortunately it was this total post-hipster, boring yuppie thing. People sat around drinking wine, and they wanted to watch the fireworks on TV, instead of going outside to see them. I was so repulsed. Please don't even become like that, Andy!

At this point, I completely stopped writing in the journal, but that's okay, because it was mostly more of the same—driving around tract home construction sites, counting cement slabs, and asking carpenters how they liked their jobs. A couple of other intersting things happened though in the last couple weeks.

The following Monday the head organizers called all 50 members of the organizing staff together to reiterate the sexual harassment policy in light of what happened to Mariko and Anna. It was completely strange because the speaker explained what was appropriate and innappropriate with an extended construction metaphor. "You have different rooms in a house, and you have different types of conversations in each room. There are some things you would say in the dining room that you wouldn't say in the foyer, and there are some things you might say in the bedroom that you wouldn't say in the living room. At work, you stay in the living room! Don't ever have bedroom conversations." He even went into how architecture had opened up a bit in the sixties, but now it was getting more traditional again.

I can't figure out if this was a good way of dealing with the subject because it was metaphor the guys could easily relate to, or if it just completely obscured the the issues. What I was sure of was that it was completely fucked that three men spoke about sexual harassment, but not even one women was invited to talk. I raised my hand and asked, "Why aren't any women speaking about this issue, since its them who are getting harassed?" The guy said, "We're getting to that." But we never did.

Another screwy aspect of the whole experience was that there were some deep divisions between different locals in the union. A few days before we had arrived some union members who were working on the San Francisco airport had a wildcat strike--which is a strike that the rest of the union doesn't authorize. But the whole thing was clouded in mystery for us, because the Regional Council which was running the organizing drive didn't want us knowing about or getting involved in the conflict. Individual organizers would tell us snippets here and there, and apparently what happened was that local wasn't satisfied with the proposed new contract, but the Regional Council and International were trying to push them into accepting it. This guy John Reiman, who turned out to be a Trotskyist, pumped up the local to stand up and fight for a better contract, so they stopped work for a day. But the contract with the airport had a "No Strike" clause, so the city was considering sueing the union for the wildcat. It was a huge mess, and both sides seemed to have good points, but we couldn't make a good judgement

because of the blackout the organzing directors were trying to create for us. Cameron eventually did get a hold of John Reiman, and we tried to figure out someway to secretly rendevouz with the wildcatters to get their side of the story, but it never panned out.

I spent four days with Henry and Mariko in the Santa Rosa area, which went much smoother than the previous weeks. We even got to got to attend a union picnic at a hot springs resort. I spent my last few days visiting sites around Manteca. I only got to go on one more house visit the whole time I was there, and the guy spoke Spanish, so I couldn't say much of substance.

The last night of Union Summer, we had the privilege of attending a house party fundraiser for the United Farm Workers. Dolores Huerta, the co-founder of the union, and a truly inspiring lifelong freedom fighter, spoke. She rejuvenated some of my faith in the union movement when she started shouting "Down with racism! Down with sexism! Si, se puede!"

We followed that party with one of our own in one of our rooms at the Best Western in Manteca. It was the first and last time I've drunken Tequila. The next morning I sat on the curb outside the hotel lobby and vomitted a huge puddle of water, that went streaming down the parking lot. Some little boy ran and got his mom, and pointed at me. It was so sweet. He looked like he was going to cry because he knew I was feeling so shitty.

We had a final meeting, where we discussed everything that had happened, paid each other compliments, exchanged addresses, and said goodbye to the local organizers who we had befriended throughout the month, then we headed out to the airport. I was sad to see everyone leave because I'd made some close friendships and I respected all the interns and especially Fernando.

**Conclusions drawn a year and a half later**--I feel strange typing this all out. It sounds like a horrible experience in many regards, but I actually have really fond memories of Union Summer, and I recommend it to anyone who is considering it.

I am dissapointed that I didn't get to take part in more aspects of an organizing campaign--like house visits, committee meetings, and rallies. But I did learn a lot about strategy and persuasive communication. The Carpenters campaign was so broad and long term (they had a 5 year game plan) that I couldn't see the results of our work immediately. But I did feel that we made an impact by speaking in Spanish with hundreds of workers who might have been passed over had we not been there. Plus I feel like I learned a lot of information about the labor movement in general.

I was frustrated at the ineptitude of some of the organizers and the shortcomongs of the union. The numerous cases of top down decision making and the fact that it is a mostly white organization in what has become a majority Latino industry are clear symbols that the union needs to change dramatically to truly be a member run organization.

I feel good that we helped make the union more progressive, by unashamedly arguing our more radical opinions, and by forcing the sexual harassment issues to be handled seriously. (All three of the guys were severely disciplined, and I think one was fired.) It really sucks though that it had to happen to young middle class women for the issue to be brought to a head, when the women that worked for the union full time were frequently harassed and didn't receive the same support.

I gained insight about what its like to be a carpenter, and saw that having a union, flawed as it may be, is incredibly beneficial. Not only were the union workers better compensated, but due to the apprenticeship program, they also had more skills which made it possible for them to do a lot more tasks, and use their heads more, instead of just pounding nail after nail where someone else told them to. Along with this came a sense of pride and self-respect that shone through very obviously.

I learned that a lot of carptenters are fucked in many ways--some are racist, sexist, homophobic, and conservative in other ways. But I also met quite a few who were incredibly kind and progressive, who deplored the bigotry of their union brothers, as well as the way the contractors took advantage of the people who work for them. Instead of the stereotypes I went into the experience with, I left knowing dozens of individual carpenters, with their own life experiences, political beliefs, and fashion senses. I've even gotten over my predjudice against men who have mustaches (although I still think they're completely heinous looking). While I don't think I'd ever want to work for the Carpenters Union, I'm definitely interested in continuing to work in the labor movement.

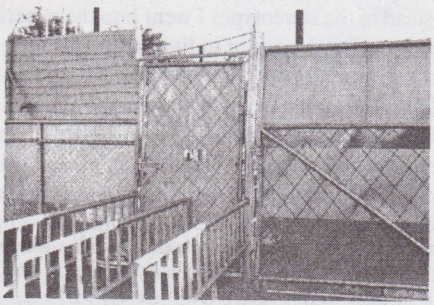
For more information and to apply for next year's Union Summer, call **1-800-952-2550** or check out **www.aflcio.org/unionsummer/index.htm**

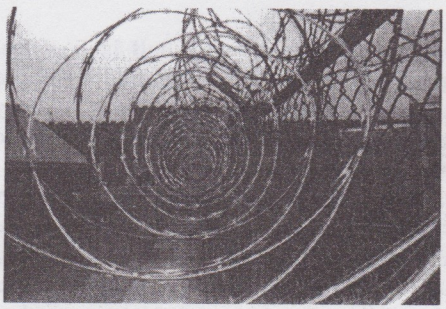
# prisons are sweatshops a sweatshops are prisons

On April 15th over 1000 people demonstrated against the Department of Justice in Washington D.C. The vast majority of the participants were in town to protest the World Bank and IMF the following day. The lively convergence of these two protests is symbolic of the unification of two growing movements for justice in the U.S. Since the mid-nineties, activists have targeted the Criminal Justice system in many ways. For example, Eli Rosenblatt and others established the Prison Activist Resource Center in 1994 and Angela Davis organized the Critical Resistance conference in 1997. At the same time college students, labor unions, and dozens of radical organizations have launched a full-scale campaign against sweatshop labor, and more broadly to fight the institutions of global capitalism. The incredible amount of support for the demonstration against the Prison-Industrial Complex by protestors originally gathered to protest the World Bank indicates that activists are making connections between what had seemingly been two disparate movements. In reality, the connections between sweatshops (a symbol of everything wrong with corporate globalization) and prisons run deep.

Sweatshops are usually made of steel and cement, like prisons. And like prisons they are guarded by men with guns and protected by rows of barbed wire. Numerous sweatshops have been discovered where workers are required to live in "dorms" above the factory. These are nothing more than metal barracks filled with rickety bunk beds that the workers are crammed into. Overtime is often mandatory, and is not even compensated. The workweek is 6, sometimes 7 days per week. 12 and even 16 hour shifts are typical. In many cases sweatshop workers are held as economic prisoners to their jobs—they are forced to surrender 1 or 2 months wages to their employers for transporting them to the free trade zones they work in. This puts them in modern day debt peonage.

Prisoners do not have adequate health care, and often suffer or die from illnesses incurred in prisons that aren't treated adequately. Health and safety standards are almost non-existent in sweatshops. Workers often become violently ill from inhaling epoxy fumes, and other chemicals. They are not provided with safety materials when working with dangerous machines. They often develop





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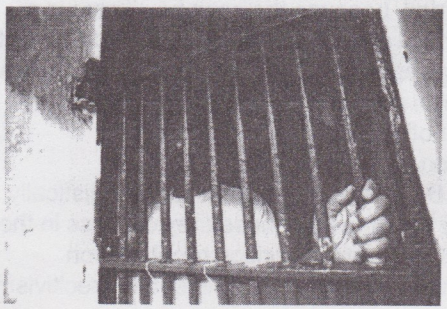
afflictions like carpal tunnel syndrome from constant repetition of motion like stitching clothes. In both prisons and sweatshops corporal punishment is commonplace and accepted. Sexual harassment and abuse is standard and inescapable in both institutions.

Prisons and sweatshops are both institutions that oppress poor people, especially people of color. The people who work in sweatshops do so because they need to in order to survive. The economic systems of the countries in which sweatshops flourish are based around producing exportable commodities for people far away to consume, rather than around fulfilling the needs of the local people. This is not a matter of chance, the economies have been established in this fashion as the result of imperialism.

U.S. prisons overwhelmingly house an analogous segment of the population—those who lack opportunities and resources. They end up in prison as the result of their circumstances—by using illegal means to attain illusive standards of living, by using drugs to escape from the seemingly impossible situation, in acts of self-defense, etc. They too are the desperate segment of society.

The majority of sweatshops are in developing nations in Central America and Southeast Asia. The people who work in them, therefore, are non-white. The sweatshops in the U.S. are centered in cities with large immigrant populations, such as Los Angeles and New York City. These sweatshops are filled with people of the same backgrounds, just on different shores. Prisons are filled disproportionately with Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans. Regardless of ethnic background, over 90% of prisoners are poor.

Sweatshops and prisons are both institutions that keep labor costs low for U.S. and European corporations. Companies can now do their manufacturing in Export Production Zones (also called Free Trade Zones) in countries where workers don't have the right or ability to organize, where raw materials cost very little in American dollars, and where environmental laws are laxly enforced or non-existant. Since major coporations now contract vast amounts of work to prisons, inmates in the U.S. compose a similar workforce—one that can't unionize and can be paid pennies an hour, yet will do the jobs regardless because in their situation working under those conditions seems like the best option



# prisons are sweatshops sweatshops are prisons

working under those conditions seems like the best option they have. Thus the cycle is complete: corporations offer few jobs at reasonable pay to working class U.S. citizens, who then resort to illegal economies, for which they are severly punished, in part by having to labor in the same jobs they would have had, but for no money. In this way, prisons keep the corporate elite rich while preventing millions of unemployed people in the U.S. from working together to fight for social change and economic justice.

Prisons and sweatshops are beneficial to people with more economic resources, usually white. Prisons provide the rural white working class with jobs caging urban working class people of color. Prisons are quickly becoming privatized. They are run by corporations whose primary goal is to maximize profits. That is the exact goal of the owners of sweatshops. In both cases human rights and dignity are disregarded, because they can be. There is a fundamental distinction about the amount of worth different lives have. Certain groups of people are considered absolutely expendable, less than human, nothing more than resources of production.

Both institutions claim, paternalistically, that they serve to help those they oppress in the long run. But effective prison rehabilitation programs are virtually non-existent and recitivism is the norm. Sweatshop workers aren't paid enough to feed themselves and their families three basic meals a day, much less invest in projects to develop their local economies. It is ahistorical to claim, like sweatshop owners currently do, that despicable conditions for workers today lead to high standards of living tomorrow, without taking into account the essential role of a radical and militant labor movement in forcing capitalists to make the huge concessions which allowed for such improvements in the U.S. and Europe.

The incredible rise in the U.S. prison population, along with the privitization of prisons, and the increasingly common practice of major U.S. corporations using prisoners as their workforce coincides neatly with the reduction of trade regulations that have enabled sweatshops manufacturing goods for American corporations to pop up by the thousands in poor countries around the globe. It would be naïve to recognize these incredibly significant develops as solely coincidental. Activists must see the prison-industrial complex and corporate globalization as intrinsically linked parts of a larger strategy for greater consolidation of wealth and power into the hands of the elite. We must understand that prisons are sweatshops and sweatshops are prisons, and we must therefore strive to abolish both.

# A Discussion Piece Regarding the Question: "Should I call myself a Punk-American?"

I have been trying to write an article about punk and ethnicity for almost a year now, and I have found it to be an almost impossible task. The issues are so complex and so loaded that I find myself writing, and deleting, and re-writing, trying a different angle, adding explanatory notes and long-winded definitions, addressing tangential trains of thought, and trying to be perfectly articulate so as not to inadvertently offend any possible readers. And I haven't gotten anywhere. Actually, that's not true. Attempting to write about race, ethnicity and subculture has made me re-examine my understandings of all those social formations, has challenged former assumptions and generalizations of mine, and has forced me to think long and hard about my own identity, background, and social position. I think my problem with writing lies in the fact that I haven't come to a resounding conclusion about these issues. And after writing probably a hundred college essays that absolutely have to assert and prove a precise argument, I've internalized this notion that I have to sound like I've got it all figured out. Witness all the rest of the writing in this zine. But fuck it. I've learned a lot just by thinking about these issues, and all the people I've discussed them with have also seemed to gain some perspective. So what follows are accounts of thought provoking experiences, quotes from other sources, some personal biographical material, a few of my half-baked theories, and a lot of questions. I really hope you will sort through this material, consider how you fit into this picture, criticize and add to my ideas, share some of your own experiences, help answer the questions I pose, and pose some of your own. I want to have a huge letters section in the next issue dealing with these issues. If there are enough responses I will create a separate section of contributions. If I have said something fucked up or hurtful, please call me on it, correct me if you want, or tell me what to read so I can figure it out myself. Onward!

A while back my friend Liz who is Jewish but not religious was talking about what a nice time she had at a celebration of Rosh Hashanah. I asked her why she went if she didn't really believe in the religion of Judaism. She said that it was comforting to eat the traditional foods and participate in the rituals associated with the holidays. Plus, she just liked spending time with other Jews. It's a cultural thing, not a religious thing, she explained.

I'd had similar conversations before, but this time I could really relate to what she was saying because I had just gotten back from the Michigan Fest. I started thinking about how good it felt to be around "my people"—more than a thousand of them—for three whole days. At the fest we ate our version of "traditional" punk food—everything served was vegan and came from small, environmentally conscious companies and cooperatives, instead of the standard multinationals. And there is no question that we participated in rituals. We wandered in, ran up and gave big hugs to friends from other cities, systematically plied through table after table of records and zines, "performed" mosh pits, half-way making fun of the dance, half-way enjoying it, we got tired and sat in the back room having the same conversations we had the previous three years, played spin the bottle, and participated in workshops about the same copy machine scams and alternative menstrual health methods we've been using for years.

Though I had done all of this close to 20 times before, and I know that things need to change and progress, it still felt good. Really good. I'd been buried in school for months. When the week of the fest came I was so excited for it because I needed to be around punks. I needed to do punk things. I was feeling desperate. It wasn't that I hated my non-punk friends at school, it wasn't that I disliked what I was studying and how I was spending my time, but I honestly felt that I needed to get back to my roots.

And for me, my roots aren't in a church or religion. My parents are agnostic and never once brought me to church. My roots aren't in an identity based around a nationality or ethnic group outside of dominant American culture. I was never told, "We do this because that's what Welsch [or whatever group] people do." I didn't have traditions or customs outside of the ones my immediate family made up. The one exception is that we often went to my Swedish grandmother's on Christmas Eve and danced around the house to a special Swedish record, which is part of the traditional Swedish Christmas celebration. But I never felt any real connection to Swedish culture or other Swedish people because Christmas was a solitary isolated expression of it.

My ancestors obviously came from other places than the U.S. But they came from about eight different European countries and my family has retained very few of the traditional customs, foods, clothes, and beliefs of the previous generations. Religion is a big part of many ethnic groups' identities, so my parents' rejection of all religion further isolates us from our past.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that I am without race and that I'm not affected by my ethnic background, that I am somehow "neutral" as a white Euro-mutt

American. The whole concept of race, as people are finally starting to realize, is a biological myth, but it still has tremendous power because so many people still believe the myth. And whites thinking only non-white people have a race is sadly also still incredibly common. Just a few months ago, while I was interning at the United Steelworkers of America, my department sent a Local Union a survey asking what the racial make-up of the workforce was in a certain steel mill. Their answer was: 20%. They meant that 20% of the workforce was non-white. That kind of thinking situates people with white skin as the standard by which everyone else deviates.

The point I'm making is that I *do* have an ethnic heritage and I *do* have white skin privilege which affect who I am and have definitely impacted my families' class position. But I *don't* feel a personal affinity for, connection with, or pride in this race/class position and identity. I don't identify with a traditional European ethnic or national culture (like Irish or German) and I don't identify with the mish-mash dominant white corporate culture that I'm surrounded by as a 21st century American, and that so many Americans have assimilated into.

Instead, I really feel my roots are in the hardcore punk community—in the traditions, in the food, in the music, and most importantly in the *values* that members of this community have in common. It's the place where I feel comfortable. It's a culture that I've actively participated in and created my identity around for over ten years. I have things in common with hardcore kids that I've never met, that I will probably never share with some of my closest friends from college or my cousins.

So when Liz was talking about being with Jewish people, doing Jewish things, eating Jewish food during Rosh Hashanah, I felt I knew, to a degree, where she was coming from. And I was happy for her, because I knew how good it felt for me to do the same type of thing the weekend before.

Note that I'm NOT saying being punk is like being in an oppressed racial group. I'm saying that it feels like I'm part of a unique culture that is important and meaningful to me. But why doesn't "white culture" do that for me?

Dominant American culture probably doesn't feel like a community to me because it is so omnipresent in my daily life, and being that it is the *dominant* culture in America, it doesn't feel in opposition to or overshadowed by some other culture. If I lived in another country (especially one that hasn't been totally remodeled by western cultural imperialism) for a while, I'd probably see "white American" as a group I fit into (with a bit of shame, no doubt). Its been shown that people in dominant groups usually don't think about membership in that group as an important defining factor of their identities. They take it for granted, which is fucked.

But I think there are other reasons too. If an essential element of being part of a cultural group is holding certain values in common, and maybe goals and ways of life based on those values, than I am outside of "white culture" in many respects, even though I was born with white skin, and I still hold the privileges that come with it.

Finally, certain scholars, such as the folks associated with the journal (not the band) Race Traitor, hold that being part of dominant/white/corporate American culture is qualitatively different than being part of other cultural groups. Noel Ignatieve claims, "There is Italian culture, and Polish, Irish, Yiddish, German, and Appalachian culture; there is youth culture and drug culture and queer culture; but there is no "white" culture--unless you mean Wonderbread and television game shows. Whiteness is nothing but an expression of race privilege." James Baldwin said, "No one was white before they came to America." Once here, Europeans became white by "deciding they were white...White men—from Norway, for example, where they were Norwegians—became white: by slaughtering the cattle, poisoning the wells, torching the houses, massacring Native Americans, raping Black women."Whiteness, they contend, is a political position, not a culture. I'm not sure what I think, so let me throw some more experiences out to sort through.

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About 5 years ago an intelligent (white) friend of mine who I highly respected, and who did an excellent zine back in the day, made a really strange comment when we were hanging out one day. We were discussing a hardcore boy from another town and she said, "I don't know about that guy. Did you know that he's dating this, like, sorority girl?! I mean...what?...punk girls aren't good enough for him, or something? Its not like there aren't any available."

I couldn't believe she said that because if you replaced "hardcore boy" and "sorority girl" with "black guy" and "white girl," or "white guy" and "latina," it would totally be a conversation about inter-racial dating.

It sounds pretty bad when you say it out loud, but I bet a lot of punks have thought about similar things. I remember having a crush on a smart political girl in a class of mine at college who didn't have a clue about punk. It was such a big part of me that I knew if I were to date her that I would have to explain it to her, in quite a bit of detail, so that she could understand who I was, and what made me think and act the way I do. And one of the things I thought about when trying to decide if I should pursue a relationship was whether or not I really had the energy to go through the whole process of explaining it to her or getting her into it.

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So parallels like this obviously get me thinking about questions like, "Does punk serve some of the functions of ethnicity for people in my social position?"

To answer questions like that it seems like we need to "take stock" a little. What I mean is we have to ask the more fundamental questions of, "What is ethnicity (as it exists in 21st century U.S.A.)?" and "What is punk?"

Well an ethnic group is a multi-generational group of people who have in common certain cultural traditions and practices, language, values, and usually a belief system or religion. A person's ethnicity is their membership in one or

more of these groups. That's not a technical book definition, its what comes to mind for me. But a definition like this seems hardly sufficient with all the issues of oppression attached to ethnicity today. You really can't talk about ethnicity without talking about the history of racial oppression, and the relationships of exploitation, approriation, and genocide between white and non-white people in the U.S.

Its also important to take into account that many people conflate race with ethnicity, and consider only non-white people in the U.S. to be ethnic. "It's a little ethnic neighborhood." "Chinese food is in the Ethnic Aisle." So non-assimilated cultures are ethnic, again creating this supposedly non-ethnic majority.

There is also the question of whether ethnicity is social or biological. Scientists have shown that there is as much variance between people of the same "race" as there is between people of different "races," meaning there is no such thing as biological races. And there are many ethnic groups within each "race." So they are social groups, cultural groups. But the fact is that people grow up as the sons and daughters of people in ethnic groups, so they are going to be completely effected by that experience, because their parents' membership in whatever group will affect, in many ways, how the parents decide to raise their children--what they teach them, what activities they support them in, what they feed them, etc. Plus, a person's ethnicity is going to affect how other people treat them. So while it is perhaps technically constructed, and thus changeable, its is also something that "happens" to people.

Okay, that's a bunch about what ethnicity is. So now, for our comparison, we need to ask what punk is. That's a tough question because it means many different things to different people. But, people usually concieve of it as one (or a combination) of three things: youth culture, subculture, or counter-culture. So--briefly--what's the difference between these things?

When people in the punk scene talk about subculture they usually are talking about the various "alternative" music scenes that young people participate in—rave, ska, hippie, punk, goth, role playing gamers, skaters, etc. But I think we need to be more specific. Sometimes when people talk about "sub-culture" they mean "subterranean" or underground; i.e., something hidden from the mainstream.

But other times when people say "sub-culture" they mean a "sub-set" of the larger society. In that sense, people who are part of a sub-culture are also part of the larger society. They often use many of the institutions of the larger society, and follow many of its social norms. But something about them—maybe the music they listen too, maybe their priorities in life—are different from the larger society. Members of the larger society are only a part of the sub-culture if they are involved in its activities. So someone could be a part of the role-playing gamers subculture, but still sexually harass a women and still eat at Taco Bell. He's still using the dominant culture's institution of capitalism, supporting fast-food consumer culture and he still holds the sexist values of the dominant culture, its just that he likes to run around a park dressed as a vampire, and the majority of Americans don't.

Youth Culture is pretty simple; it's the style, the activities, the attitude, and the interests that teenagers and people in their twenties partake in and identify with. There are obviously numerous youth cultures happening at any given time. Youth culture can be something contrived and controlled by corporate executives, which I would call mainstream youth culture, or it can be somewhat independent of the huge culture producers. The only defining characteristic of a youth culture is that its young people who identify with it. It can be completely reactionary (fundamentalist Christian youth groups) or totally revolutionary. Youth culture, then, is a form of subculture, since a segment of the population (young people) take part in it, but also are based in the dominant culture.

Counter-culture on the other hand is directly confrontational to the dominant culture. There is a difference between being an alternative culture that is not hostile to dominant culture and is fine with a certain "peaceful coexistence" and one that is directly oppositional. Its not just a sub-category, its is qualitatively different, and actively opposed to dominant culture. A true counter-culture has at its core different values than the dominant culture, and it creates its own institutions that are in line with those values, that it uses to exist outside of and dismantle the dominant culture.

For some kids punk is nothing more than a youth subculture. But for others (including me) it is much closer to being a counter-culture. Or at least people who have grown up involved in DIY hardcore/punk, and have been shaped by that experience are working at forming a counter-culture. It has its own institutions--things like record and zine distribution services, nationwide organizations like Food Not Bombs, and insider networking publications. It has a value system that is oppositional to that of dominant American culture: work and consumerism are devalued, personal communication and environmentalism are highly valued, participation is valued over spectatorship, and on and on.

So, with all that laid out, its time to make some evaluations. My personal conclusion is: the punk I refer to is a counter-culture. As such, in some ways it is similarly positioned with respect to dominant American culture as some ethnic groups are. Though in neither case can one entirely escape the influence of mainstream culture, one's counter-culture or ethnicity offers an alternative set of values, traditions, aesthetics, language, and beliefs, that are often in competition with those of the mainstream.

Ethnic groups who refuse to assimilate are seen as counter-cultural by whites, whether they mean to be or not. Whites always view other cultures as a threat to them--that's where you get "English only" laws from, concerns about the "Asian Invasion" and all these other racist initiatives. Many whites are gravely afraid of being a cultural minority because dominant culture is so critical to maintaining the power structure.

So there are some important similarities, but there are also some key differences between counter-cultures and

ethnicities. In the U.S. ethnic groups which don't assimilate are targeted, oppressed, misrepresented, and exploited. Being a part of one of these groups is in most cases not a choice. It isn't something someone chooses to get into and can choose to get out of when its too tough or unsatisfying. Though counter-cultures are often targeted, and members of them are sometimes discriminated against for not-conforming, that is *not* that same as a people having been persecuted throughout history. It is difference in magnitude and type of oppression, and it is different because people that choose to be in counter-cultures are consciously choosing to play an adversarial role. While people who are in non-oppositional subcultures may also get discriminated against, it is still on a much different scale and for different reasons than racial discrimination and oppresion is.

Secondly, the punk counter-culture is not multi-generational. There are some punk babies and punk toddlers out there (all of the ones I've met have exceptionally cool and adorable), but it is definately questionable how long, and in what form this community will last. I, myself, often question if I will always be involved in it, or if I'll eventually walk away like so many friends have done. Ethnicities are by definition multi-generational. Tradition and custom are essential parts of them. There are traditions and customs in punk, but it remains to be seen if they are important enough to stand the test of time.

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So another important question that arises out of this discussion is: how is punk experienced differently by people of color and whites? I, of course, can not speak for punks who aren't white. But lately there have been a number of amazing contributions to the discussion of how ethnicity and punk function together created by punks of color. A few that stand out are Martin Sorrendeguy's documentary *Beyond the Screams/ Mas Alla de los Gritos*, and the compilation zine *Evolution of a Race Riot* (EOARR) which Mimi Nguyen put together.

A lot of the contributors to these projects have emphasized that being punk does not erase one's ethnicity, and it shouldn't. We can't all just be "punks" because people of color still have to deal with racism all the time (including within the scene), and looking at all punks as the same ignores people's real experiences and the importance of their cultures in their lives, the same way saying "we're all Americans" does.

In *Beyond the Screams*, Jose Palofax says something along the lines of, "I often don't feel like I totally fit in to the punk scene because of being latino, and I sometimes don't feel like I completely fit in my community because of my involvement with punk." That's a paraphrase because I don't own the video. But the point is that people have complex identities and exist within multiple communities at once. The same goes for queer punks and others who find support, understanding, and meaning in different groups of people at different times.

Punk is obviously going to be experienced differently by people coming to it as disserters of white culture, and those coming as survivors of it. Punk would most likely be an addition, not a "substitute," to one's parents' culture, if that culture is one the punk took pride in and felt supported by.

***

A friend of mine has been undergoing the process of rejecting "whiteness" as his culture. His mother is a latina and his father is white. He grew up in the same predominantly white suburb that I did, and it seems like his family tried to assimilate to a large extent. In high school he went by his first name and his father's last name, both of which are European in origin.

But towards the end of high school and through college he began studying politics and issues of race and ethnicity. He began learning about and claiming his Xicano heritage, and rejecting the dominant white culture that he was brought up in for its racism, exploitation, and other reasons He might have been able to "pass" as white, and obtain the benefits that come along with that identity, but now he intentionally goes by his "Spanish" middle name and a created surname, and in some ways modifies his appearance to appear more recognizably Xicano. He decided to move to a predominantly Xicano neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas, and work as a teacher and activist in the community.

I reject white culture for many of the same reasons as my friend does. But I don't have an ethnic identity to claim. I could go back and learn about the Irish, German, Scotch, Welsch, Swedish, and other cultures distant relatives of mine grew up in, but that doesn't seem like it would be that fulfilling or helpful to me.

What I do have is the punk community. Could I step away from whiteness, like my friend did, and define myself in a way I feel better about? Simply calling myself something different would not cleanse me of racism, and would not abrogate my privileges. But would there be any positive affects of such a move?

I can think of a few reasons why claiming punk as my culture could be beneficial, and also a number of reasons why it would be a bad idea. First the good.

Corny as it sounds, it would be an affirmation of "punk pride." It would say, "This is my culture, this is my community; its a community filled with an amazing group of people--people who do great things, people that I am proud to share so much in common with."

At the same time, it would be a move against dominant white culture. If you agree with the Race Traitor critique, and believe that abolishing the white race is possible and an important goal to work towards (I haven't decided if I do or not, personally), then punk, or other sub-cultures and counter-cultures might be a place for fomer-whites to go when they are in cultural free fall.

Also, it might help some white kids to stop regarding whiteness as neutral, benign, and non-ethnic: the un-race. If whiteness is something that people take for granted because it is so ever present and because its particular characteristics are often considered "universal," than considering themselves part of a much smaller, specific group, with alternative values and ways of doing things might give them serve to decenter them, and realize their ways of living are one path of many, not the standard by which others deviate.

On a somewhat related theme, thinking of punk as

ethnicity might help some kids see how problematic it is to claim to be "colorblind." Opponents of Affirmative Action are always saying, "I'm colorblind. We're all the same. A black person is no different to me than a white person." But again, that serves to obscure important cultural differences, and it pushes for assimilation into whiteness, since it supposedly calls for being raceless. Punk kids might see past that false ideal, their culture was the one being erased. Imagine some crusty punk kids going to a restaurant, and getting hasseled by the owners or other customers. Some do gooder yuppie businessman (this is a hypothetical here) says, "Hey! Stop hassling those kids. They're just like you and me!" Now, if it were me, I might be appreciative of the support, but I would also think, "Like Hell I'm the same as you! We have totally different priorities in life, we don't dress anything a like--and I like my patched up hoody much better than your Gucci suit--and I think capitalism is fundamentally flawed, while you can't get enough of it. I deserve the same rights and respect as you, but I'm not the same!"

Also, it might help us concieve of punk differently so that we make it applicable to more parts of our lives than just our teens and early twenties. There is a difference between a music scene, a movement, and a culture, and people limit what they put into and expect to get out of it accordingly.

But I can also think of good number of reasons not to think of punk as an ethnicity. First, it could be taken as incredibly insulting by people of color, who have had to struggle and face discrimination their entire lives because of their ethnic and racial background. I wouldn't blame anyone for saying punk is no way near as deeply important and complex as an ethnic culture. Calling it the same thing might devalue their experiences. This would be especially true if kids who are more of "youth culture" punks than "counter-culture" punks jumped on the bandwagon. Plus, for all the talk to the contrary, punk is still deeply racist. Why jump from one racist culture to another?

If the people calling themselves Punk-American, or whatever, thought doing so made them above racism and an oppressed racial group, it would be completely appropriative, and only be more racist.

Additionally, it could serve to further ghettoize punks who already are too wrapped up in their own little world and disconnected from other social groups that they should interact and ally themselves with. It might very well further alienate non-white punks as well.

There is plenty more to say on this topic, but no more room in the zine. When I started I was undecided but leaning towards "Punk-American" but now I'm leaning the other way. Let me know what you think.

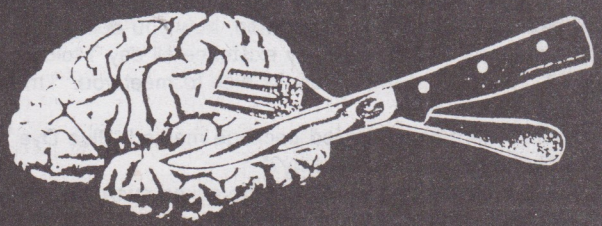
In the intro to EOARR Mimi Nguyen writes, "I want to bring up something a girl of color said in response to the recent glut of white women and men in the scene finally noticing their "whiteness" and tearfully pledging to be our "allies," to destroy racism: 'Great. I feel safe now.'"

The point is well taken; I don't intend for these five pages to end racism, or to try to earn me a place on some imaginary "good white kid list." I do, of course, want to end racism, and that is one reason I wrote all this. But I also want to figure out my own identity and build community; I needed to write this and start this dialogue for those reasons also.

My final question is: Huggy Bear sings, "This is happening without your permission--the arrival of a new renegade, boy/girl hyper-nation." Will new technology create "hyper-nations" where geographical regions and political boundries are irrelevant, and where communities/cultures/ethnicities are formed on the basis of common beliefs and desires, not circumstance of birth? Are we, as punks, broadly defined, a "hyper-nation?" Sometimes I think, "No, and its a damned good thing!" Other times punk does seem like a hyper-nation, and its the most exciting thing in the world.

The rich man carves his beefsteak with impunity because he first applies the knifeblade to his brain.

-Jonathon Kozol



# Separating the Shit from the Puke

There is a moment of truth in temp workers' lives when we are subject to the inhumane task of choosing our own poison. "Clerical or Industrial?" is the Agency's question. Button up shirts, neckties, and banter with the dreariest people on earth to stave off the boredom of staring at a computer screen for hours on end, or casual clothes in dangerous factories fighting with heavy machinery next to brawny dudes whose beliefs and goals in life are almost always diametrically opposed to mine?

On a whim, a while back, I chose Industrial and found myself working for five an hour at a facility that did the laundry for every hospital in western Michigan. The operation was run out of a warehouse in an area of town I didn't even know existed.

Upon arriving, a short woman walked me to a cart full of blankets, showed me once how she expected them folded and briskly walked away. "Some orientation!" I thought, as I began pulling the staticky polyester blend blankets from the bin and heaving them awkwardly in the air, trying to get them folded right. Who's ever heard of someone folding blankets alone? When I finished the cart, I realized the woman hadn't told me where to put the folded blankets or what to do next. I meekly began to ask the woman working next to me, "Um...excuse me, where do I..."

"Don't ask me any questions!" She bellowed. "I ain't your boss!"

Yikes! I wandered around blankly for a few minutes, trying to figure out what to do or where my "boss" had gone. A guy stepped up to me and asked if I was a temp. When I told him I was, he said, "Good. Follow Me. We need you on the other side." I was then lead from the warm and dry, if somewhat unfriendly, "clean side" into the hellish nightmare of the "dirty side."

"Here, put these on!" my new manager instructed, handing me a pile of blue paper scrubs and protective gear. It must of taken me five minutes to get it all on—shirt and pants to go over my regular clothes, then booties, rubber gloves, a paper hat, and a face mask. The manager lead me up the steps of a monstrous contraption that I soon discovered was an automated sorting station. I was placed on a line with about five other workers in front of enormous laundry bins suspended from crane arms. In front of the bins ran a conveyor belt loaded with dirty hospital laundry. I was to grab sheets, blankets, scrubs, gowns, towels, and pillowcases, and throw them in their assigned bin. I realized why I had put such heavy duty protective gear once I was left to my task: the laundry was covered in every imaginable substance known to play tag with a person's gag reflex. Blood, both wet and caked in, piss, smears of shit, chunky vomit, spongy green slimy stuff (are lobotomies still performed on a regular basis?) pieces of skin, it all came by, and I had to frantically grab it and sort it. A few hours in to the task, my mind numb to the gore, I tugged a towel off the belt and scalpel flew out. "Jesus Christ, this job is insane," I thought. Later I found a pair of surgical scissors and a second scalpel tucked in a balled up pillowcase.

Towards the end of the shift, thinking it couldn't possibly get much worse than it already was, a young looking guy, probably in his early twenties, with long curly black hair coming out from under a stiff mesh back baseball cap approached me. "Hey man, how you doing?" he asked. Since he was practically the first person to acknowledge my existence all day, I told him I was doing alright and introduced myself. "Hey. I'm Steve, man, its nice to meet you. I'm the line supervisor for sorting." So, the guy was my boss.

"Here man," he said, handing me a small, sealed package marked "Blue Dye." "You got to dump this in the bin with the little blue towels. Ya know why?"

"To keep them blue?" I ask, a bit confused as to why he asked such an obvious question.

"No man, to cover up the blood and the AIDS, that's why!"

"Eh...Okay," I said, a little scared to know what Steve meant by "covering up the AIDS."

"But don't worry about the AIDS, man," he quickly went on to say, "you won't catch it."

"Yeah, I'm wearing the protective gear..." I started to respond

"You think that's going to protect you? That won't protect you! That shit goes through the air man!" Steve excitedly let me know.

"You can't get AIDS through the air!" I told him, incredulously. Where had this guy been the last ten years? I was starting to get worried, he being my boss, and therefore directly in charge of my safety, and all. Then he dropped the bomb.

"Of course you can get AIDS through the air—how do you think I got it? Not from fucking some guy!"

Stunned, I didn't say anything else. I just sorted pillowcases adorned with lumps of shit for another half hour, until the shift was over, and got the hell out of there as fast as I could. Fuck the necktie and eyestrain from staring at a computer; next time I'm taking Clerical hands down. At least I won't be sorting pathogen borne laundry, with no training, under the supervision of a homophobe who has AIDS and doesn't know how he got it.

Question you should be asking yourself: But what about the illegal immigrants who made up most of the permanant staff?

# Butterfly Ballot Reviews

**Instructions: Read and watch all of the following. Then darken the circle next to the arrow, next to the review of each book or film that totally inspired you, profoundly taught you, or otherwise blew you out of the water.**

***Between the Hills and the Sea* by K.B. Gilden**. Cornell University Press. An incredible radical novel about a union leader working in an electric parts plant during the 1950s. There is so much going on in this novel: shopfloor politics, communism, community environmental organizing, and cross-class romanticization and relationships. Well written and completely engrossing. An unknown classic. Probably my favorite fiction.

***Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners***. The most beautifully produced, graphic intensive, book I've ever laid my eyes on, and the ideas screaming from every page are even more beautiful. An all out exhortation to live your desires joyfully and freely, with plenty of advice on how. I read this before sleeping, and dreamed of being in the CrimethInc. Underground. Then I woke up, and I *was* in it. Yes, I'm a dork.

***Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by Dick Hebdige.** Routledge. First Hebdige explains teddy boys, mods, skins, and punks as products of the changing relationship between the native white and black immigrant British working class, then he details how subcultural style is used as a visual language of opposition, and how dominant society eventually defuses its power. I needed a dictionary, but it changed my life.

***No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* by Naomi Klein**. Picador. Thoroughly tackles every aspect of anti-corporatism including: selling brands instead of products, standardization of culture, corporate sponsored youth rebellion, sweatshops and temp jobs, media consolidation and censorship. Then highlights and critiques anti-corporate activism. Precisely reasoned, totally inspiring.

***Senseless Acts of Beauty* by George Mckay**. Verso. Details post-60s British cultures of resistance including the New Age travellers, ravers, road protestors, and even a whole chapter on Crass. Examines the politics of the way participants live their lives, and of the cultural products they create. Also check out *DIY Culture: Party and Protest in 90's Brittain*, edited by McKay. Similar, but in the participants own words.

***Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* by Robin D. G. Kelley**. Free Press. Kelley takes us on a tour of black resistance throughout the 20th Century including: Alabama Communists, Spanish Civil War participants, Malcolm X during his hustler stage, McDonald's employees, and gangsta rappers. Also proves that long before Rosa Parks blacks were physically battling to desegregate busses.

***Zines: Notes from Underground* by Stephen Duncombe.** Verso. This is the only one worthwhile book about zines, in my opinion. It examines the politics of the medium--the form--of zines. Duncombe also accurately summarizes many common currents of discussion, and adds adds to them, coming from punk radical academic perspective. I'm so jealous I didn't write this book, because it says everything I've wanted to say for five years.

***Cradle Will Rock.*** A Tim Robbins film about a New Deal era Federal Theatre playwright whose production is shut down for being to radical. Bertolt Brecht, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera all have cameos. Its musical and political, and shows the history of people's art in America before radical puppets and Art and Revolution. Watch it than start your own troop. WPA (Works Progress Administation) in the house!

***The Inheritors.*** An Italian landowner dies, leaving his farm to the peasants who work it, and class war ensues. Set in a small village, probably in the 1920's or 30's, the peasants have to figure out collective ownership, get over their own sexism, ally with other local workers and protect themselves from the indignant local gentry. An all around anarchist film, though it never mentions the word. Subtitled.

***Billy Elliot.*** New British film about a working class boy in the 80's who wants to be a ballet dancer, but has a traditional (sexist) father and brother (who are involved in a miner's stike) that don't want a "puff" in the family. English accents, class struggle, gender issues and queer boys--how could I not love this movie? The politics are right on throughout. A PC "heartwarmer." And it makes you want to dance!

***Wild Reeds.*** A totally sweet romantic French film about three cute teens in the 1960's brought together and torn apart by their politics. A bi-curious neo-fascist boy, a girl in the communist youth brigade, and another cutie pie boy, trying to get his shit figured out, makes for an Andy movie all the way. It doesn't end quite right, in my opinion, but at least its a challenging ending! Swoon.

***Election***. You know high school teachers bad mouth some of their students and want to fuck others. You know the Student Government was a load of shit. You know suburbs are barren, lonely places with no public space, you know half the adults in your city are unsatisfied with their lives. Election confirms all your suspicions. Probably the funniest, most brutally acerbic movie I've ever seen.

***Beyond the Screams/Mas Allla de los Gritos***. Martin from Los Crudos' documentary about the Latino/a punk scene is the most inspiring, moving thing I've seen in years. Argues that Latino punk is explicitly political to deal with the intense oppression that participants face in their daily lives, addresses issues of identifying with both one's ethnicity and counter-culture, and exposes bands from the 80s, Latin & S. America.

**"Oh...wow..thanks Mr. McAllister!":** Ariana Goobliati, Adam Krame-dog, Adam Kuthe, Deanna Hitchcock, Mike Q. Roth, Eric and Bethany Miesberger, Phoebe Hanshew, Steve Wishart, Kim Mitchell, Doug Eddy, Theo Witsell, Mary Chamberlain, Jason Kucsma, Jen Angell, Brooke Rossi, Eileen, Kenny, Kurt Mangum, Adam Mullet, Ryan Wilson, Aaron Oswiany, John Gerken, Josh Sanchez, John Strange, everyone in all the following crews: SOLE crew, Union Summer Crew, USWA Crew, Pirate House Crew, West Michigan Kids Crew, Mr. Roboto Project Crew, Peach Pit Crew, My Own Pine Box Crew, U-M Crew, New York Crew, Tickstock Crew, everyone who I've met through Words As Weapons, Kerstin, Mom, Dad, and all the rest of my friends.

**Back Issues:** I'll make some up when I find a good copy scam. #1, $1 ppd. #2 & 3, $2 each ppd. Email me, before sending money for them.

**The bands that give me goose-bumps (not "goose-pimples", mind you):** Strike Anywhere, Anti-Product, Lovesick, Weakerthans, Soophie Nun Squad, Manu Chao, Dead Prez, Rainy Day Regatta, Tem Eyos Ki.

**Great zines and Magazines:** Harbinger, I Defy, Nappy Bush, Spectacle/Fucktooth split, I Hate This Part of Texas, Drinking Sweat in the Ash Age, Here Be Dragons, Mishap, Brat, Insurgente, Kiss Off, Otaku, Clamor, Stay Free!, Adbusters, Bust, The Baffler, Punk Planet, Z Magazine.

**Printing and Distribution:** 1,000 copies printed January 2001 by the Small Publisher's Co-op for slightly more than $1,000. No ads=it all came out of my pocket. I'd absolutely love help with distribution--mail order and stores. Wholesale rates: 5 for $10, 10 for $18 ppd. Past issues distributed by: Tree of Knowledge, Stickfigure, Pander, Wooden Shoe Books, Primordial Soup Kitchen (R.I.P.), and some friendly individuals. Support them please!

**Art Credits:** The two photos of bands are by Aaron O., the armpit print is by Adam Kuthe, the Starbucks picture is from the Michigan Daily online, the picture of the stylish Yugoslav girls is from Workers World newspaper, the pictues of my sister and I are by my dad. "If we must die.." quote by a poet from the Black Arts Movement, whose name I can't hunt down for the life of me. Sweatshop photos by the National Labor Committee. Prison photos by Chris Cozzone. Gender Guerilla by Ben Fife.

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I'm going to be on the road quite a bit for a while. Stuff sent to this address will definately get to me, but it might take a bit for my parents to relay it. If you want to get something to me fast, email first and I'll tell you where to write!

Writing this zine has consumed my life for the past six months. Thanks so much for reading it. *Please* write me and let me know what you think. I love meeting new people. I'll try hard to be a good correspondent. I'll even come visit you if you want! Make your own noise. Educate, Agitate, and Organize. Live. Live. Live."

# The Menace To Youth

## A YOUTH EDITORIAL

## I AM YOUTH

I AM YOUTH. I am careless and hectic YOUTH. I am clumsy and blundering YOUTH.

America greets me with a thousand hideous perils. I plunge almost blindly, among them.

"Peace—Peace—Peace," is the soothing murmur out of the lush grass. But under the soft green I find the crimson coiled snake of Communism. Loathsome and treacherous, it bares its fangs to strike. It is drenched with the blood of Spain and Russia. It reeks with the stench of its own God-less soul. Caressingly it whispers "Disarm—Disarm—Disarm." But it means "Turn your back and close your eyes so that I may kill and destroy you."

I AM YOUTH! I am trusting and gullible YOUTH.

Soft shadows fall about me, and deep in their velvet curtains lurks the hooded spectre of **Crime.** Grim and terrible, it lifts its ugly head out of a whirlpool of lawlessness. With insidious cunning it seeks to drag me down to its slimy pit of hate and dishonesty.

I AM YOUTH! I am gay and passionate YOUTH.

The swaying ryhthm of the night club beckons me. The pop of the cork seeks to rob me of reason. The arched eyes of the lady of the street invites me to my own ruin. The rattle of dice and the tense whirl of the roulette wheel entice me, with gentle hands and honeyed words, to my doom.

The gauntlet is long and dangerous. The mark is high. The trials are hard and severe.

But I am YOUTH. I am dauntless, AMERICAN YOUTH. The fate of America is in my hands. I am strong and ready. **I shall not fail.** The aggregate courage of our dead heroes burns in my breast. I WILL STAMP OUT COMMUNISM! I WILL PROMOTE NATIONAL DEFENSE! I WILL OBLITERATE CRIME! I WILL WASH MYSELF CLEAN OF VICE AND CORRUPTION!

I, the YOUTH of America, pledge these vows before God. I will live and die—A TRUE AMERICAN.